

5 0117
Most
HALF
PRICE **BOOKS**
\$ 1.00

Copyright 1903, by M. Walter Dwyer.



A SELECTION from the WRITINGS
of GUY DE MAUPASSANT

SHORT STORIES

OF THE TRAGEDY
AND COMEDY
OF LIFE

AFTER THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY V. ROTTEMBOURG.

“‘Darling!’ she cried, ‘do thank this gentleman. He
has been charming to me.’”

WITH A CRITICAL PREFACE BY

PAUL FOURGET

of the French Academy

AND AN INTRODUCTION BY

ROBERT ARNOLD, M. A.

VOL. II

The Century of Hudson Co.

New York

AT THE OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
WASHINGTON, D. C.

A SELECTION *from the* WRITINGS
:: of GUY DE MAUPASSANT ::

SHORT STORIES
of the TRAGEDY
AND COMEDY
OF LIFE



WITH A CRITICAL PREFACE BY
PAUL BOURGET
of the French Academy

AND AN INTRODUCTION BY
ROBERT ARNOT, M. A.

VOL. II

The Review of Reviews Co.
New York

COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY
M. WALTER DUNNE

Entered at Stationers' Hall, London

TABLE OF CONTENTS*

VOLUME II.

	PAGE
1. MARGOT'S TAPERS	I
2. THE ACCENT	7
3. BERTHA	13
4. IN THE MOONLIGHT	26
5. THE ARTIST'S WIFE	33
6. IN THE SPRING	42
7. A REPULSE	51
8. SOLITUDE	62
9. THE MAN WITH THE BLUE EYES	69
10. THE OLD MAID	76
11. THE SPECTER	89
12. THE RELIC	98
13. HAPPINESS	105
14. A DUEL	113
15. THE LOVE OF LONG AGO	121
16. THE FARMER'S WIFE	127
17. BESIDE A DEAD MAN	137
18. A QUEER NIGHT IN PARIS	143
19. THE UMBRELLA	157
20. THE QUESTION OF LATIN	169
21. HE ?	182
22. LETTER FOUND ON A CORPSE	192
23. THE LITTLE CASK	200
24. A FISHING EXCURSION	209
25. AFTER	216
26. THE SPASM	224
27. MY UNCLE SOSTHENES	233
28. ALL OVER	243
29. THE HORRIBLE	252
30. THE FIRST SNOWFALL	261
31. BOITELLE	273
32. A LUCKY BURGLAR	286
33. AN ODD FEAST	291
34. LITTLE LOUISE ROQUE	297

* At the close of the last volume will be found a complete list of the French Titles of De Maupassant's writings with their English equivalents.

MARGOT'S TAPERS

I.



ON THE evening of Midsummer day, Margot Fresquyl had allowed herself to taste for the first time the delicious intoxication of the mortal sin of loving.

While most of the young people were holding one another's hands and dancing in a circle round the burning logs, the girl had slyly taken the deserted road which lead to the wood, leaning on the arm of her partner, a tall, vigorous farm-servant, whose Christian name was Tiennou, which, by the way, was the only name he had borne from his birth. For he was entered on the register of births with this curt note, "Father and mother unknown," having been found on St. Stephen's Day under a shed on a farm, where some poor, despairing wretch had abandoned him, perhaps even without turning her head to look at him.

For months Tiennou had madly worshiped the pretty blond girl, who was now trembling as he clasped her in his arms, under the sweet coolness of the leaves. He well remembered how she had dazzled

him—like some ecstatic and ineffaceable vision,—the first time that he saw her in her father's mill, where he had gone to ask for work. She stood out all rosy from the warmth of the day, amid the impalpable clouds of flour, which diffused a misty whiteness through the air. With her hair hanging about her in untidy curls, as if she had just awakened from a profound sleep, she stretched herself lazily, her bare arms clasped behind her head, yawning so as to show her white teeth, which glistened like those of a young wolf, and from beneath her unbuttoned bodice her maiden bosom appeared with innocent immodesty. He told her that he thought her adorable, so stupidly that she made fun of him and scourged him with her cruel laughter. From that day, he spent his life in Margot's shadow. He might have been taken for one of those wild beasts ardent with desire, which ceaselessly utter maddened cries to the stars on nights when the constellations bathe the dark coverts in warm light. Margot met him wherever she went, and seized with pity, and by degrees attracted by his ardor, by his dumb entreaties, by the burning looks which flashed from his large eyes, she had returned his love. She had dreamed restlessly that during a whole night she had been in his vigorous arms, which pressed her like corn that is being crushed in the mill; that she was obeying a man who had subdued her, and was learning strange things which other girls talked about in a low voice when drawing water at the well.

She had, however, been obliged to wait until Midsummer day, for the miller watched over his heiress very carefully.

The two lovers told each other all this as they were going along the dark road, innocently giving utterance to words of happiness which rose to their lips like the refrain of a forgotten song. At times they were silent, not knowing what more to say and not daring to embrace each other any more. The night was soft and warm, the warmth of a half-closed alcove in a bedroom, and had the effect of a tumbler of new wine.

The leaves were sleeping motionless and in supreme peace, and in the distance they could hear the monotonous trill of the brooks as they flowed over the stones. Amid the faint noise of the insects, the nightingales were answering each other from tree to tree. Everything seemed alive with hidden life, the sky was bright, and the falling stars might have been taken for white forms wandering among the dark trunks of the trees.

"Why have we come?" Margot asked, in a panting voice. "Do you not want me any more, Tien-nou?"

"Alas! I dare not," he replied. "Listen: you know that I was picked up on the highroad, that I have nothing in the world except my two arms, and that miller Fresquyl will never let his daughter marry a poor devil like me."

She interrupted him with a painful gesture, and putting her lips to his, she said:

"What does that matter? I love you, and I want you. Take me."

And thus it was, on St. John's eve, that Margot Fresquyl for the first time yielded to the mortal sin of love.

II.

Did the miller guess his daughter's secret when he heard her singing merrily from dawn till dusk and saw her sitting dreaming at her window instead of sewing as she was in the habit of doing?

Did he see it when she threw ardent kisses from the tips of her fingers to her lover at a distance?

Whether he did or not, he shut up poor Margot in the mill as if it had been a prison. No more love or pleasure, no more meetings at night on the verge of the wood. When she chatted with the passers-by, or tried furtively to open the gate of the inclosure to make her escape, her father beat her as if she had been some disobedient animal, beat her until she would fall on her knees on the floor with clasped hands, scarcely able to move, her whole body covered with purple bruises.

She pretended to obey him, but she revolted in her whole being, and the string of bitter insults which he heaped upon her rang in her head. With clenched hands, and a gesture of terrible hatred, she cursed him for standing in the way of her love. At night, she rolled about on her bed, bit the sheets, moaned, stretched herself out for imaginary embraces, maddened by the longing with which her body was still palpitating. She called out Tiennou's name aloud, she broke the peaceful stillness of the sleeping house with her heartrending sobs, and her weeping drowned the monotonous sound of the water dripping under the arch of the mill, between the immovable paddles of the wheel.

III.

Then came that terrible week in October when the unfortunate young fellows who had drawn bad numbers had to join their regiments.* Tiennou was one of them. Margot was desperate at the thought of not seeing him for five interminable years, and grieving that they could not even, at that hour of sad farewell, be alone and exchange those consoling words which afterward soften the pang of absence.

Tiennou prowled about the house, like a starving beggar, and one morning, while the miller was mending the wheel, he managed to see Margot.

"I will wait for you in the old place to-night," he whispered, in terrible grief. "I know it is the last time. I shall throw myself into some deep hole in the river if you do not come!"

"I will be there, Tiennou," she replied, in a bewildered manner. "I swear I will be there, even if I have to do something terrible to enable me to come!"

* * * * *

The village was on fire, illuming the dark night, and the flames, fanned by the wind, rose up like evil torches. The thatched roofs, the ricks of corn, the haystacks, and the barns fell in and crackled like rockets, while the sky looked as if it was illuminated by an aurora borealis. Fresquyl's mill was smoking,

* Written before universal service was obligatory, and when soldiers were selected by conscription, a certain proportion of those who drew high numbers being exempt from service.

and its calcined ruins were reflected on the deep water. The sheep and cows were running about the fields in terror, the dogs were howling, and the women were sitting on the broken furniture, crying and wringing their hands. At this time Margot was abandoning herself to her lover's ardent caresses, and with her arms round his neck she said to him, tenderly:

"You see that I have kept my promise. I set fire to the mill so that I might be able to get out. So much the worse if all have suffered. But I do not care as long as you love me, are happy with me!"

And pointing to the fire, which was still burning fiercely in the distance, she added with a burst of savage laughter:

"Tiennou, we shall not have such beautiful tapers at our wedding Mass when you come back from your regiment!"

And thus it was that for the second time Margot Fresquyl yielded to the mortal sin of love.

THE ACCENT



IT WAS a large sheltered house, with long white terraces shaded by vines, from which one could see the sea. Large pines stretched a dark arch over the ruined *façade*, and there was a look of neglect, of want, and wretchedness about the place, such as irreparable losses, departure to other countries, and death leave behind them.

The interior wore a strange look, with half unpacked trunks serving for wardrobes, with piles of bandboxes, and for seats an array of worm-eaten armchairs, into which bits of velvet and silk, cut from old dresses, had been patched at random. Along the walls there were rows of rusty nails which made one think of old portraits and of pictures full of family history, which had one by one been sold for a song to some second-hand furniture broker.

The rooms were in disorder and furnished at random, while velvets hanging from the ceilings and in the corners seemed to show that as the servants were no longer paid except by promises, they no longer did

more than occasionally give them an accidental, careless touch with the duster. The drawing-room, which was extremely large, was full of useless knick-knacks, the sort of rubbish which is put up for sale at stalls at watering-places, daubs—they could not be called paintings—of portraits and of flowers, and an old piano with yellow keys.

Such is the home where she who had been called the handsome Madame de Maurillac was spending her monotonous existence, like some unfortunate doll which inconstant, childish hands have thrown into a corner in a loft—she who had almost passed for a professional seductress, and whose coqueties, at least so the faithful ones of the Party said, had been able to excite a passing and last spark of desire in the dull eyes of the Emperor.

Like many others, she and her husband had waited for his return from Elba, had discounted a fresh, immediate chance, had kept up boldly and spent the remains of fortune in the game of luxury.

On the day when the illusion vanished, and he was forced to awake from his dream, Monsieur de Maurillac, without considering that he was leaving his wife and daughter behind him almost penniless, and not strong enough morally to make up his mind to come down in the world, to vegetate, to fight creditors, to accept some sinecure, poisoned himself, like a shopgirl forsaken by her lover.

Madame de Maurillac did not mourn for him. As this lamentable event had made her interesting, and as she was assisted and supported by unexpected acts of kindness, and had a good adviser in one of those old Parisian lawyers who can extricate you out of

the worst difficulties, she managed to save something from the wreck, and to keep a small income. Then reassured and emboldened, and resting her ultimate illusions and her frail hopes on her daughter's radiant beauty, she prepared for that last game in which they would risk everything, and hoping also that she might herself marry again, the ancient flirt arranged a double existence.

For months and months she would disappear from the world, and, as a pretext for her isolation and for hiding herself in the country, alleged her daughter's delicate health, and the important interests she had to look after in the South of France.

Her frivolous friends looked upon this as a great act of heroism, as something almost superhuman, and so courageous, that they tried to distract her by their incessant letters, and religiously informed her of all the scandals and love adventures that came to light in the suburbs as well as in the apotheosis of the capital.

The difficult struggle which Madame de Maurillac had to keep up in order to maintain her rank was really as fine as any campaign in the twilight of defeat, a slow retreat where men only give way inch by inch, fighting until the last cartridge is expended or fresh troops arrive, to bar the way to the enemy, and save the threatened flag.

Broken in by the same discipline, and haunted by the same dream, mother and daughter lived on almost nothing in the dull, dilapidated house which the peasants called the *château*, and economized like poor people who only have a few hundred francs a year to live on. But Fabienne de Maurillac developed well in

spite of everything, and grew up into a woman—like some rare flower preserved from all contact with the outer air and reared in a hothouse.

In order that she might not lose her Parisian accent by speaking too much with the servants, who had remained peasants though in livery, Madame de Maurillac, who had not been able to bring a lady's maid with her, on account of the extra cost which traveling expenses and wages would have entailed, and who, moreover, was afraid that some indiscretion might betray her maneuver and cover her with ridicule, made up her mind to wait on her daughter herself. And Fabienne talked with nobody but her, saw nobody but her, and was like a little novice in a convent. Nobody was allowed to speak to her, or to interfere with her walks in the large garden, or on the white terraces that were reflected in the blue water.

As soon, however, as the season for the country and the seaside came, they packed up their trunks, and locked the doors of their house of exile. As they were not known, and took those terrible trains which stop at every station, by which you arrive at your destination in the middle of the night, with the certainty that nobody will be waiting for you and see you get out of the carriage, they traveled third class, so that they might have a few bank notes the more with which to make a show.

A fortnight in Paris in the family house at Auteuil, a fortnight in which to try on dresses and bonnets and to show themselves, and then Trouville, Aix, or Biarritz, the whole show complete, with parties succeeding parties, money spent as if they did not know

its value, balls at the Casinos, constant flirtations, compromising intimacies with that kind of admirers who immediately surround two pretty women, one in the radiant beauty of her eighteen years, and the other in the brightness of that maturity which the beautiful September days bring with them.

Unfortunately, however, they had to do the same thing over again every year, and as if bad luck were continuing to follow them implacably, Madame de Maurillac and her daughter did not succeed in their endeavors, did not manage during the usual absence from home to make some eligible bachelor fall in love immediately, and ask for Fabienne's hand. Consequently, they were very unhappy. Their energies flagged, and their courage left them, like water that escapes, drop by drop, through a crack in a jug. They grew low-spirited, and no longer dared to be open toward each other and to exchange confidences and projects.

Fabienne, with her pale cheeks, her large eyes with blue circles round them, and her closed lips, looked like a captive princess tormented by constant *ennui*, who is troubled by evil suggestions, and dreams of flight and of escape from the prison where Fate holds her captive.

One night, when the sky was covered with heavy thunderclouds and the heat was most oppressive, Madame de Maurillac called to her daughter, whose room was next to hers. After calling her loudly for some time in vain, she sprang out of bed in fright and almost broke open the door with her trembling hands. The room was empty, and the pillows untouched.

Then, half mad and foreseeing some irreparable misfortune, the poor woman ran all over the large house, and rushed out into the garden, where the air was heavy with the scent of flowers. She acted like some wild animal that is pursued by a pack of hounds, trying to penetrate the darkness with her anxious looks, and gasping as if some one were holding her by the throat. Suddenly she staggered, uttered a painful cry, and fell down in a fit.

There, before her in the shadow of the myrtle-trees, Fabienne was sitting on the knees of a man—of the gardener—with both her arms round his neck, kissing him ardently. As if to defy her, and to show her how vain all her precautions and her vigilance had been, the girl was telling her lover, *in the country dialect*, and in a cooing and delightful voice, how she adored him and belonged to him.

Madame de Maurillac is in a lunatic asylum, and Fabienne has married the gardener.


Could she have done better?

BERTHA



MY OLD friend—one has friends occasionally who are much older than oneself—my old friend

Doctor Bonnet had often invited me to spend some time with him at Riom, and as I did not know Auvergne, I made up my mind to go there in the summer of 1876.



I got there by the morning train, and the first person I saw on the platform was the doctor. He was dressed in a gray suit, and wore a soft, black, wide-brimmed, high-crowned felt hat, which was narrow at the top like a chimney pot, a hat which hardly anyone except an Auvergnat would wear, and which smacked of the charcoal-burner. Dressed like that, the doctor had the appearance of an old young man, with a spare body under a thin coat, and a large head covered with white hair.

He embraced me with that evident pleasure which country people feel when they meet long expected friends, and stretching out his arm said proudly: "This is Auvergne!"

I saw nothing before me, except a range of mountains, whose summits, which resembled truncated cones, must have been extinct volcanoes.

Then, pointing to the name of the station, he said:

“*Riom*, the fatherland of magistrates, the pride of the magistracy, ought rather to be the fatherland of doctors.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Why?” he replied with a laugh. “If you transpose the letters, you have the Latin word *mori*, to die. That is the reason why I settled here, my young friend.”

And delighted at his own joke, he carried me off, rubbing his hands.

As soon as I had swallowed a cup of coffee, he made me go and see the town. I admired the chemist's house, and the other celebrated houses, which were all black, but as pretty as knickknacks, with their *façades* of sculptured stone. I admired the statue of the Virgin, the patroness of butchers, and he told me an amusing story about this, which I will relate some other time. Then Doctor Bonnet said to me:

“I must beg you to excuse me for a few minutes while I go and see a patient, and then I will take you to Chatel-Guyon, so as to show you the general aspect of the town, and all the mountain chain of the Puy-de-Dôme, before lunch. You can wait for me outside; I shall only go upstairs and come down immediately.”

He left me outside one of those old, gloomy, silent, melancholy houses which one sees in the provinces. This one appeared to look particularly sinister,

and I soon discovered the reason. All the large windows on the first floor were half boarded up with wooden shutters. The upper part of them alone could be opened, as if one had wished to prevent the people who were locked up in that huge stone trunk from looking into the street.

When the doctor came down again, I told him how it had struck me, and he replied:

"You are quite right; the poor creature who is living there must never see what is going on outside. She is a madwoman, or rather an idiot, what you Normans would call a *Niente*.* It is a miserable story, but a very singular pathological case at the same time. Shall I tell you of it?"

I begged him to do so, and he continued:

"Twenty years ago, the owners of this house, who were my patients, had a daughter who was seemingly like all other girls. But I soon discovered that while her body became admirably developed, her intellect remained stationary.

"She began to walk very early, but could not talk. At first I thought she was deaf, but discovered that although she heard perfectly, she did not understand anything that was said to her. Violent noises made her start and frightened her, without her understanding how they were caused.

"She grew up into a superb woman, but she was dumb, from an absolute want of intellect. I tried all means to introduce a gleam of sense into her head, but nothing succeeded. I thought that I noticed that she knew her nurse, though as soon as she was

*A *Nothing*, i. e., an idiot.

weaned, she failed to recognize her mother. She could never pronounce that word, which is the first that children utter, and the last which men murmur when dying on the field of battle. She sometimes tried to talk, but produced nothing but incoherent sounds.

“When the weather was fine, she laughed continually, emitting low cries which might be compared to the twittering of birds. When it rained she cried and moaned in a mournful, terrifying manner, like the howling of a dog when death occurs in a house.

“She was fond of rolling on the grass, like young animals do, and of running about madly. She used to clap her hands every morning when the sun shone into her room, and would jump out of bed and insist, by signs, on being dressed as quickly as possible, so that she might get out.

“She did not appear to distinguish between people, between her mother and her nurse, or between her father and me, or between the coachman and the cook. I liked her parents, who were very unhappy on her account, very much, and went to see them nearly every day. I dined with them tolerably frequently, which enabled me to remark that Bertha (they had called her Bertha) seemed to recognize the various dishes, and to prefer some to others. At that time she was twelve years old, but as fully formed in figure as a girl of eighteen, and taller than I was. Then, the idea struck me of developing her greediness, and by such means to try and produce some slight power of discernment into her mind—to force her, by the diversity of flavors, if not by reason, to arrive at instinctive distinctions, which would of

themselves constitute a species of analysis akin to thought. Later on, by appealing to her senses, and by carefully making use of those which could serve us, we might hope to obtain a kind of reaction on her intellect, and by degrees increase the involuntary action of her brain.

“One day I put two plates before her, one of soup, and the other of very sweet vanilla cream. I made her taste each of them successively, then I let her choose for herself, and she ate the plate of cream. In a short time I made her very greedy, so greedy that it appeared as if the only idea she had in her head was the desire for eating. She recognized the various dishes perfectly, stretched out her hands toward those that she liked, and took hold of them eagerly, crying when they were taken from her. Then I thought I would try and teach her to come to the dining-room, when the dinner bell rang. It took a long time, but I succeeded in the end. In her vacant intellect, there was a fixed correlation between the sound and her taste, a correspondence between two senses, an appeal from one to the other, and consequently a sort of connection of ideas,—if one can term an instinctive hyphen between two organic functions an idea,—and so I carried my experiments further, and taught her, with much difficulty, to recognize meal-times on the face of the clock.

♡ “It was impossible for me for a long time to attract her attention to the hands, but I succeeded in making her remark the clockwork and the striking apparatus. The means I employed were very simple. I asked them not to have the bell rung for lunch,

but that everybody should get up and go into the dining-room when the little brass hammer struck twelve o'clock; but I found great difficulty in making her learn to count the strokes. She ran to the door each time she heard the clock strike, but by degrees she learned that all the strokes had not the same value as regarded meals, and she frequently fixed her eyes, guided by her ears, on the dial of the clock.

"When I noticed that, I took care, every day at twelve and at six o'clock, to place my fingers on the figures twelve and six, as soon as the moment she was waiting for, had arrived. I soon noticed that she attentively followed the motion of the small brass hands, which I had often turned in her presence.

"She had understood! Perhaps I should rather say that she had seized the idea. I had succeeded in getting the knowledge, or rather the sensation of the time into her, just as is the case with carp, who certainly have no clocks, but know that they are fed every day at a certain time.

"When once I had obtained that result, all the clocks and watches in the house occupied her attention almost exclusively. She spent her time in looking at them, in listening to them, and in waiting for meal-times, and once something very funny happened. The striking apparatus of a pretty little Louis XVI. clock that hung at the head of her bed had got out of order, and she noticed it. She sat for twenty minutes, with her eyes on the hands, waiting for it to strike ten, but when the hand passed the figure, she was astonished at not hearing anything. So stupefied was she, indeed, that she sat down, no doubt overwhelmed by a feeling of violent emotion,

such as attacks us in the face of some terrible catastrophe. She had the wonderful patience to wait until eleven o'clock, in order to see what would happen, but, as she naturally heard nothing, she was suddenly either seized with a wild fit of rage at having been deceived and imposed upon by appearances, or else was overcome by the fear which a frightened creature feels at some terrible mystery, or by the furious impatience of a passionate individual who meets with some obstacle. She took up the tongs from the fireplace, and struck the clock so violently that she broke it to pieces in a moment.

"It was evident, therefore, that her brain did act and calculate, obscurely it is true, and within very restricted limits, for I could never succeed in making her distinguish persons as she distinguished the time. To stir her intellect, it was necessary to appeal to her passions, in the material sense of the word, and we soon had another, and alas! a very terrible proof of this!

* * * * *

"She had grown up into a splendid girl; a perfect type of a race, a sort of lovely and stupid Venus. She was sixteen, and I have rarely seen such perfection of form, such suppleness, and such regular features. I said she was a Venus; yes, a fair, stout, vigorous Venus, with large, bright, vacant eyes, blue as the flowers of the flax plant. She had a large mouth with full lips, the mouth of a glutton, of a sensualist, a mouth made for kisses. Well, one morning her father came into my consulting-room, with a strange look on his face, and sitting down, without even replying to my greeting, he said:

“‘I want to speak to you about a very serious matter. Would it be possible—would it be possible for Bertha to marry?’

“‘Bertha to marry! Why, it is quite impossible!’

“‘Yes, I know, I know,’ he replied. ‘But reflect, doctor—don’t you think—perhaps—we hoped—if she had children—it would be a great shock to her, but a great happiness, and who knows whether maternity might not rouse her intellect?’

“‘I was in a state of great perplexity. He was right, and it was possible that such a new situation, and that wonderful instinct of maternity which beats in the hearts of the lower animals as it does in the heart of a woman, which makes a hen fly at a dog’s jaws to defend her chickens, might bring about a revolution, an utter change in her vacant mind, and set the motionless mechanism of her thoughts into movement. And then, moreover, I immediately remembered a personal instance. Some years previously I had possessed a spaniel bitch which was so stupid that I could do nothing with her, but when she had had pups she became, if not exactly clever, yet as intelligent as many other dogs who have not been thoroughly broken.

“‘As soon as I foresaw the possibility of this, the wish to get Bertha married grew on me, not so much out of friendship for her and her poor parents, as from scientific curiosity. What would happen? It was a singular problem, and I said to her father:

“‘Perhaps you are right. You might make the attempt—but—but you will never find a man to consent to marry her.’

“‘I have found somebody,’ he said in a low voice.

"I was dumfounded, and said: 'Somebody really suitable? Some one of your own rank and position in society?'

"'Decidedly,' he replied.

"'Oh! And may I ask his name?'

"'I came on purpose to tell you and to consult you. It is Monsieur Gaston du Boys de Lucelles.'

"I felt inclined to exclaim: 'What a wretch,' but I held my tongue, and after a few moments' silence, I said:

"'Oh! Very good. I see nothing against it.'

"The poor man shook me heartily by the hand, and said:

"'She is to be married next month.'

* * * * *

"Monsieur Gaston du Boys de Lucelles was a scapegrace of good family, who, after having spent all that he had inherited from his father, and having incurred debts by all kinds of doubtful means, had been trying to discover some other way of obtaining money. Hence this method. He was a good-looking young fellow, and in capital health, but fast—one of that odious tribe of provincial fast men—and appeared to me to be the sort of a husband who could be got rid of later, by making him an allowance. He came to the house to pay his addresses, and to strut about before the idiot girl, who, however, seemed to please him. He brought her flowers, kissed her hands, sat at her feet, and looked at her with affectionate eyes; but she took no notice of any of his attentions, and made no distinction between him and the other persons about her.

“However, the marriage took place, and you may guess how excited my curiosity was. I went to see Bertha the next day, to try and discover from her looks whether any feelings had been roused in her, but I found her just the same as she was every day, wholly taken up with the clock and dinner, while he, on the contrary, appeared really in love, and tried to rouse his wife’s spirits and affection by little endearments and such caresses as one bestows on a kitten. He could think of nothing better.

“I called upon the married couple pretty frequently, and I soon perceived that the young woman knew her husband, and gave him those eager looks which she had hitherto only bestowed on sweet dishes.

“She followed his movements, knew his step on the stairs or in the neighboring rooms and clapped her hands when he came in. Her face was changed and brightened by the flames of profound happiness and of desire. She loved him with her whole body and with all her being, to the very depths of her poor, weak soul, and with all her heart, the poor heart of some grateful animal. It was really a delightful and innocent picture of simple passion, of carnal and yet modest passion, such as nature planted in mankind, before man complicated and disfigured it by all the various shades of sentiment. But he soon grew tired of this ardent, beautiful, dumb creature, and did not spend more than an hour a day with her, thinking it sufficient to devote his nights to her, and she began to suffer in consequence. She used to wait for him from morning till night, with her eyes on the clock. She did not even look after the meals now, for he took all his away from home, Clermont,

Chatel-Guyon, Royat, no matter where, as long as he was not obliged to come home.

"She began to grow thin; every other thought, every other wish, every other expectation, and every other confused hope disappeared from her mind, and the hours during which she did not see him became hours of terrible suffering to her. Soon he used frequently not to come home at night; he spent them with women at the Casino at Royat, and did not come home until daybreak. But she never went to bed before he returned. She would remain sitting motionless in an easy-chair, with her eyes fixed on the clock, which turned so slowly and regularly round the china face on which the hours were painted.

"When she heard the trot of his horse in the distance, she would sit up with a start. When he came into the room, she would get up with the movements of a phantom, and point to the clock, as if to say to him: 'Look how late it is!'

"He began to be afraid of this amorous and jealous, half-witted woman, and flew into a rage, like brutes do; and one night he even went so far as to strike her, so they sent for me. When I arrived she was writhing and screaming in a terrible crisis of pain, anger, passion, how do I know what? Can anyone tell what goes on in such undeveloped brains?

"I calmed her by subcutaneous injections of morphine, and forbade her to see that man again, for I saw clearly that marriage would infallibly kill her, by degrees.

* * * * *

"Then she went mad! Yes, my dear friend, that idiot has gone mad. She is always thinking of him

and waiting for him; she waits for him all day and night, awake or asleep, at this very moment, ceaselessly. When I saw her getting thinner and thinner, never taking her eyes off the clocks, I had them removed from the house. I thus make it impossible for her to count the hours, or to remember, from her indistinct reminiscences, at what time he used to come home. I hope to destroy the recollection of it in time, and to extinguish that ray of thought which I had kindled with so much difficulty.

"The other day I tried an experiment. I offered her my watch. She took it and looked at it for some time; then she began to scream terribly, as if the sight of that little object had suddenly aroused her recollection, which was beginning to grow indistinct. She is pitifully thin now, with hollow and brilliant eyes, and she walks up and down ceaselessly, like a wild beast does in its cage. I have had bars put to the windows, and have had the seats fixed to the floor, so as to prevent her from looking to see whether he is coming.

"Oh! her poor parents! What a life they must lead!"

We had got to the top of the hill, and the doctor turned round and said to me:

"Look at Riom from here."

The gloomy town looked like some ancient city. Behind it, a green, wooded plain studded with towns and villages, and bathed in a soft blue haze, extended until it was lost in the distance. Far away, on my right, there was a range of lofty mountains with round summits, or truncated cones, and the doctor began to enumerate the villages, towns, and hills, and

to give me the history of all of them. But I did not listen to him; I was thinking of nothing but the mad woman, and only saw her. She seemed to be hovering over that vast extent of country like a mournful ghost, and I asked him abruptly:

"What has become of the husband?"

My friend seemed rather surprised, but after a few moments' hesitation, he replied:

"He is living at Royat, on an allowance that they make him, and is quite happy; he leads a very fast life."

As we were going slowly back, both of us silent and rather low-spirited, an English dogcart, drawn by a thoroughbred horse, came up behind us and passed us rapidly. The doctor took me by the arm:

"There he is," he said.

I saw nothing except a gray felt hat, cocked over one ear, above a pair of broad shoulders, driving off in a cloud of dust.

IN THE MOONLIGHT



WELL-MERITED was the name, "soldier of God," by the Abbé Marignan. He was a tall, thin priest, fanatical to a degree, but just, and of an exalted soul. All his beliefs were fixed, with never a waver. He thought that he understood God thoroughly, that he penetrated His designs, His wishes, His intentions.

Striding up and down the garden walk of his little country parsonage, sometimes a question rose in his mind: "Why did God make that?" Then in his thoughts, putting himself in God's place, he searched obstinately, and nearly always was satisfied that he found the reason. He was not the man to murmur in transports of pious humility, "O Lord, thy ways are past finding out!" What he said was: "I am the servant of God; I ought to know the reason of what he does, or to divine it if I do not."

Everything in nature seemed to him created with an absolute and admirable logic. The "wherefore" and the "because" were always balanced. The dawns

were made to rejoice you on waking, the days to ripen the harvests, the rains to water them, the evenings to prepare for sleeping, and the nights dark for sleep.

The four seasons corresponded perfectly to all the needs of agriculture; and to him the suspicion could never have come that nature has no intention, and that all which lives has accustomed itself, on the contrary, to the hard conditions of different periods, of climates, and of matter.

But he hated women; he hated them unconsciously, and despised them by instinct. He often repeated the words of Christ, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" and he would add, "One would almost say that God himself was ill-pleased with that particular work of his hands." Woman for him was indeed the "child twelve times unclean" of whom the poet speaks. She was the temptress who had ensnared the first man, and who still continued her damnable work; she was the being who is feeble, dangerous, mysteriously troublous. And even more than her poisonous beauty, he hated her loving soul.

He had often felt women's tenderness attack him, and though he knew himself to be unassailable, he grew exasperated at this need of loving which quivers continually in their hearts.

To his mind, God had only created woman to tempt man and to test him. Man should not approach her without those precautions for defense which he would take, and the fears he would cherish, near an ambush. Woman, indeed, was just like a trap, with her arms extended and her lips open toward a man.

He had toleration only for nuns, rendered harmless by their vow; but he treated them harshly notwithstanding, because, ever at the bottom of their chained-up hearts, their chastened hearts, he perceived the eternal tenderness that constantly went out even to him, although he was a priest.

He had a niece who lived with her mother in a little house near by. He was bent on making her a sister of charity. She was pretty and hare-brained, and a great tease. When the abbé sermonized, she laughed; when he was angry at her, she kissed him vehemently, pressing him to her heart, while he would seek involuntarily to free himself from her embrace. Notwithstanding, it made him taste a certain sweet joy, awaking deep within him that sensation of fatherhood which slumbers in every man.

Often he talked to her of God, of his God, walking beside her along the footpaths through the fields. She hardly listened, but looked at the sky, the grass, the flowers, with a joy of living which could be seen in her eyes. Sometimes she rushed forward to catch some flying creature, and bringing it back would cry: "Look, my uncle, how pretty it is; I should like to kiss it." And this necessity to "kiss flies" or sweet flowers worried, irritated, and revolted the priest, who saw, even in that, the ineradicable tenderness which ever springs in the hearts of women.

One day the sacristan's wife, who kept house for the Abbé Marignan, told him, very cautiously, that his niece had a lover!

He experienced a dreadful emotion, and he stood choking, with the soap all over his face, in the act of shaving.

When he found himself able to think and speak once more, he cried: "It is not true; you are lying, Melanie!"

But the peasant woman put her hand on her heart; "May our Lord judge me if I am lying, Monsieur le Curé. I tell you she goes to him every evening as soon as your sister is in bed. They meet each other beside the river. You have only to go there between ten o'clock and midnight, and see for yourself."

He ceased scratching his chin and commenced to pace the room quickly, as he always did in his hours of gravest thought. When he tried to begin his shaving again, he cut himself three times from nose to ear.

All day long, he remained silent, swollen with anger and with rage. To his priestly zeal against the mighty power of love was added the moral indignation of a father, of a teacher, of a keeper of souls, who has been deceived, robbed, played with by a child. He felt the egotistical sorrow that parents feel when their daughter announces that she has chosen a husband without them and in spite of their advice.

After his dinner, he tried to read a little, but he could not attune himself to it; and he grew angrier and angrier. When it struck ten, he took his cane, a formidable oaken club which he always carried when he had to go out at night to visit the sick. Smilingly he regarded the enormous cudgel, holding it in his solid, countryman's fist and cutting threatening circles with it in the air. Then, suddenly, he raised it, and grinding his teeth, he brought it down upon a chair, the back of which, split in two, fell heavily to the ground.

He opened his door to go out; but he stopped upon the threshold, surprised by such a splendor of moonlight as you seldom see.

Endowed as he was with an exalted spirit, such a spirit as must have belonged to those dreamer-poets, the Fathers of the Church, he felt himself suddenly softened and moved by the grand and serene beauty of the pale-faced night.

In his little garden, bathed in the soft brilliance, his fruit-trees, all a-row, were outlining in shadow upon the walk their slender limbs of wood scarce clothed with green; while the giant honeysuckle climbing on the house wall exhaled delicious, sugared breaths, which hovered through the warm, clear night like a perfumed soul.

He began to breathe deep, drinking the air as drunkards drink their wine, and walking slowly, ravished, surprised, and almost oblivious of his niece.

As he stepped into the open country he stopped to contemplate the whole plain, inundated by this caressing radiance, and drowned in the tender and languishing charm of the serene night. In chorus the frogs threw into space their short, metallic notes, and with the seduction of the moonlight, distant nightingales mingled that fitful music of theirs which brings no thoughts but dreams, a light and vibrant melody which seems attuned to kisses.

The abbé continued his walk, his courage failing, he knew not why. He felt, as it were, enfeebled, and suddenly exhausted; he had a great desire to sit down, to pause right there and praise God in all His works.

Below him, following the bends of the little river, wound a great line of poplars. On and about the banks, wrapping all the tortuous watercourse in a kind of light, transparent wadding, hung suspended a fine mist, a white vapor, which the moon-rays crossed, and silvered, and caused to gleam.

The priest paused yet again, penetrated to the depths of his soul by a strong and growing emotion. And a doubt, a vague uneasiness, seized on him; he felt that one of those questions he sometimes put to himself was now being born.

Why had God done this? Since the night is destined for sleep, for unconsciousness, for repose, for forgetfulness of everything, why, then, make it more charming than the day, sweeter than dawns and sunsets? And this slow, seductive star, more poetical than the sun, and so discreet that it seems designed to light up things too delicate, too mysterious, for the great luminary,—why had it come to brighten all the shades? Why did not the sweetest of all songsters go to rest like the others? Why set himself to singing in the vaguely troubling dark? Why this half-veil over the world? Why these quiverings of the heart, this emotion of the soul, this languor of the body? Why this display of seductions which mankind never sees, since night brings sleep? For whom was this sublime spectacle intended, this flood of poetry poured from heaven to earth? The abbé did not understand it at all.

But then, down there along the edge of the pasture appeared two shadows walking side by side under the arched roof of the trees all soaked in glittering mist.

The man was the taller, and had his arm about his mistress's neck; from time to time he kissed her on the forehead. They animated the lifeless landscape which enveloped them, a divine frame made, as it were, expressly for them. They seemed, these two, a single being, the being for whom this calm and silent night was destined; and they approached the priest like a living answer, the answer vouchsafed by his Master to his question.

He stood stock-still, overwhelmed, and with a beating heart. He likened it to some Bible story, such as the loves of Ruth and Boaz, the accomplishment of the will of the Lord in one of those great scenes talked of in holy writ. Through his head ran the versicles of the Song of Songs, the ardent cries, the calls of the body, all the passionate poetry of that poem which burns with tenderness and love. And he said to himself, "God perhaps has made such nights as this to clothe with his ideals the loves of men."

He withdrew before the couple, who went on arm in arm. It was really his niece; and now he asked himself if he had not been about to disobey God. For does not God indeed permit love, since He surrounds it visibly with splendor such as this?

And he fled, in amaze, almost ashamed, as if he had penetrated into a temple where he had no right to enter.

THE ARTIST'S WIFE



CURVED like a crescent moon, the little town of Étretat, with its white cliffs and its blue sea, is reposing under the sun of a grand July day. At the two points of the crescent are the two gates, the little one at the right, and the large one at the left, as if it were gradually advancing to the water—on one side a dwarfed foot, on the other, a leg of giant proportions; and the spire, nearly as high as the cliff, large at the base and fine at the summit, points its slim head toward the heavens.

Along the beach, upon the float, a crowd is seated watching the bathers. Upon the terrace of the Casino, another crowd, seated or walking, parades under the full light of day, a garden of pretty costumes, shaded by red and blue umbrellas embroidered in great flowers of silk. At the end of the promenade, on the terrace, there are other people, calm, quiet, walking slowly along up and down, as far as possible from the elegant multitude.

A young man, well-known, and celebrated as a painter, John Summer, was walking along with a listless air beside an invalid chair in which reposed a young woman, his wife. A domestic rolled the little carriage along, gently, while the crippled woman looked with sad eyes upon the joy of the heavens, the joy of the day, and the joy of other people.

They were not talking, they were not looking at each other. The woman said: "Let us stop a little."

They stopped, and the painter seated himself upon a folding chair arranged for him by the valet. Those who passed behind the couple, sitting there mute and motionless, regarded him with pitying looks. A complete legend of devotion had found its way about. He had married her in spite of her infirmity, moved by his love, they said.

Not far from there, two young men were seated on a capstan, chatting and looking off toward the horizon.

"No, it is not true," said one of them, "I tell you I know much of John Summer's life."

"Then why did he marry her? For she was really an invalid at that time, was she not?"

"Just as you see her now. He married her—he married her—as one marries—well, because he was a fool!"

"How is that?"

"How is that? That is how, my friend. That is the whole of it. One is a goose because he is a goose. And then you know, painters make a specialty of ridiculous marriages; they nearly always marry their models, or some old mistress, or some one of

the women among the varied assortment they run up against. Why is it? Does anyone know? It would seem, on the contrary, that constant association with this race that we call models would be enough to disgust them forever with that kind of female. Not at all. After having made them pose, they marry them. Read that little book of Alphonse Daudet, 'Artists' Wives,' so true, so cruel, and so beautiful.

"As for the couple you see there, the accident that brought about that marriage was of a unique and terrible kind. The little woman played a comedy, or rather a frightful drama. In fact, she risked all for all. Was she sincere? Does she really love John? Can one ever know that? Who can determine, with any precision, the real from the make-believe, in the acts of women? They are always sincere in an eternal change of impressions. They are passionate, criminal, devoted, admirable, and ignoble, ready to obey unseizable emotions. They lie without ceasing, without wishing to, without knowing it, without comprehension, and they have with this, in spite of this, an absolute freedom from sensation and sentiment, which they evince in violent resolutions, unexpected, incomprehensible folly, putting to rout all our reason, all our custom of deliberation, and all our combination of egotism. The unforeseen bluntness of their determinations make them, to us, indecipherable enigmas. We are always asking: 'Are they sincere? Are they false?'

"But, my friend, they are sincere and false at the same time, because it is in their nature to be the two extremes and neither the one nor the other. Look at the means the most honest employ for obtaining what

they wish. They are both complicated and simple, these means are. So complicated that we never guess them in advance, so simple that after we have been the victims of them, we cannot help being astonished and saying to ourselves: 'My! Did she play me as easily as that?' And they succeed always, my good friend, especially when it is a question of making us marry them.

"But here is John Summer's story:

"The little wife was a model, as the term is usually understood. She posed for him. She was pretty, particularly elegant, and possessed, it appears, a divine figure. He became her lover, as one becomes the lover of any seductive woman he sees often. He imagines he loves her with his whole soul. It is a singular phenomenon. As soon as one desires a woman, he believes sincerely that he can no longer live without her. They know very well that their time has arrived. They know that disgust always follows possession; that, in order to pass one's existence by the side of another being, not brutal, physical appetite, so quickly extinguished, is the need, but an accordance of soul, of temperament, of humor. In a seduction that one undertakes, in bodily form, it is necessary to mingle a certain sensual intoxication with a charming depth of mind.

"Well, he believed that he loved her; he made her a heap of promises of fidelity and lived completely with her. She was gentle and endowed with that undeniable elegance which the Parisian woman acquires so easily. She tiptoed and babbled and said silly things, which seemed *spirituelle*, from the droll way in which she put them. She had each moment

some little trick or pretty gesture to charm the eye of the painter. When she raised an arm, or stooped down, or got into a carriage, and when she took your hand, her movements were always perfect, exactly as they should be.

"For three months John did not perceive that, in reality, she was like all models. They rented for the summer a little house at Andressy. I was there one evening, when the first disquiet germinated in the mind of my friend.

"As the night was radiant, we wished to take a turn along the bank of the river. The moon threw in the water a glittering shower of light, crumbling its yellow reflections in the eddy, in the current, in the whole of the large river, flowing slowly along.

"We were going along the bank, a little quiet from the vague exaltation which the dreaminess of the evening threw about us. We were wishing we might accomplish superhuman things, might love some unknown beings, deliciously poetic. Strange ecstasies, desires, and aspirations were trembling in us.

"And we kept silent, penetrated by the serene and living freshness of the charming night, by that freshness of the moon which seems to go through the body, penetrate it, bathe the mind, perfume it and steep it in happiness.

"Suddenly Josephine (she called herself Josephine) cried out:

"'Oh! did you see the great fish that jumped down there?'

"He replied, without looking or knowing: 'Yes, dearie.'

"She was angry. 'No, you have not seen it since your back was turned to it.'

"He laughed. 'Yes, it is true. It is so fine here that I was thinking of nothing.'

"She was silent; but at the end of a minute, the need of speaking seized her, and she asked:

"'Are you going to Paris to-morrow?'

"He answered: 'I don't know.'

"Again she was irritated:

"'Perhaps you think it is amusing to walk out without saying anything,' she said; 'one usually talks if he is not too stupid.'

"He said nothing. Then, knowing well, thanks to her wicked, womanly instinct, that he would be exasperated, she began to sing that irritating air with which our ears and minds had been wearied for the past two years:

"'I was looking in the air.'

"He murmured: 'I beg you be quiet.'

"She answered furiously: 'Why should I keep quiet?'

"He replied: 'You will arouse the neighborhood.'

"Then the scene took place, the odious scene, with unexpected reproaches, tempestuous recriminations, then tears. All was over. They went back to the house. He allowed her to go on without reply, calmed by the divine evening and overwhelmed by the whirlwind of foolishness.

"Three months later, he was struggling desperately in the invincible, invisible bonds with which habit enlaces our life. She held him, oppressed him,

martyrized him. They quarreled from morning until evening, insulting and combating each other.

"Finally, he wished to end it, to break, at any price. He sold all his work, realizing some twenty thousand francs (he was then little known) and, borrowing some money from friends, he left it all on the chimney-piece with a letter of adieu.

"He came to my house as a refuge. Toward three o'clock in the afternoon, the bell rang. I opened the door. A woman jumped into my face, brushed me aside, and rushed into my studio; it was she.

"He stood up on seeing her enter. She threw at his feet the envelope containing the bank-notes, with a truly noble gesture and said, with short breath:

" 'Here is your money. I do not care for it.'

"She was very pale and trembling, ready, apparently for any folly. He, too, grew pale, pale from anger and vexation, ready, perhaps, for any violence.

"He asked: 'What do you want, then?'

"She replied: 'I do not wish to be treated like a child. You have implored me and taken me. I ask you for nothing—only protect me.'

"He stamped his foot, saying: 'No, it is too much! And if you believe that you are going—'

"I took hold of his arm. 'Wait, John,' said I, 'let me attend to it.'

"I went toward her, and gently, little by little, I reasoned with her, emptying the sack of arguments that are usually employed in such cases. She listened to me motionless, with eyes fixed, obstinate and dumb. Finally, thinking of nothing more to say, and seeing that the affair would not end pleasantly, I struck one more last note. I said:

“‘He will always love you, little one, but his family wishes him to marry, and you know—’

“‘This was a surprise for her! ‘Ah!—Ah!—now I comprehend—’ she began.

“‘And turning toward him she continued: ‘And so—you are going to marry!’

“‘He answered carelessly: ‘Yes.’

“‘Then she took a step forward: ‘If you marry, I will kill myself—you understand.’

“‘‘Well, then, kill yourself,’ he hissed over his shoulder.

“‘She choked two or three times, her throat seeming bound by a frightful anguish. ‘You say—you say— Repeat it!’

“‘He repeated: ‘Well, kill yourself, if that pleases you!’

“‘She replied, very pale with fright: ‘It is not necessary to dare me. I will throw myself from that window.’

“‘He began to laugh, advanced to the window, opened it, bowed like a person allowing some one to precede him, saying:

“‘‘Here is the way; after you!’

“‘She looked at him a second with fixed eyes, terribly excited; then, taking a leap, as one does in jumping a hedge in the field, she passed before him, before me, leaped over the sill and disappeared.

“‘I shall never forget the effect that this open window made upon me, after having seen it traversed by that falling body; it appeared to me in a second, great as the sky and as empty as space. And I recoiled instinctively, not daring to look, as if I had fallen myself.

"John, dismayed, made no motion.

"They took up the poor girl with both legs broken. She could never walk again.

"Her lover, foolish with remorse, and perhaps touched by remembrance, took her and married her. There you have it, my dear."

The evening was come. The young woman, being cold, wished to go in; and the domestic began to roll the invalid's little carriage toward the village. The painter walked along beside his wife, without having exchanged a word with her for an hour.

IN THE SPRING



WHEN the first fine spring days come, and the earth awakes and assumes its garment of verdure, when the perfumed warmth of the air caresses your face and fills your lungs, and even seems to reach your heart, you feel vague longings for an undefined happiness, a wish to run, to walk anywhere and everywhere, to inhale the soul of the spring.

As the winter had been very severe the year before, this longing assumed an intoxicating feeling in May; it was like a superabundance of sap.

Well, one morning on waking, I saw from my window the blue sky glowing in the sun above the neighboring houses. The canaries hanging in the windows were singing loudly, and so were the servants on every floor; a cheerful noise rose up from the streets, and I went out, with my spirits as bright as the day, to go—I did not exactly know where. Everybody I met seemed to be smiling; an air of happiness appeared to pervade everything in the

warm light of returning spring. One might almost have said that a breeze of love was blowing through the city, and the young women whom I saw in the streets in morning toilettes, in the depths of whose eyes there lurked a hidden tenderness, and who walked with languid grace, filled my heart with agitation.

Without knowing how or why, I found myself on the banks of the Seine. Steamboats were starting for Suresnes, and suddenly I was seized by an unconquerable wish for a walk through the wood. The deck of the *mouche** was crowded with passengers, for the sun in early spring draws you out of the house, in spite of yourself, and everyone is active, visiting and gossiping with the people sitting near.

I had a female neighbor; a little workgirl, no doubt, who possessed the true Parisian charm. Her little head, had light curly hair like frizzed light, which came down to her ears and to the nape of her neck, danced in the wind, and then became such fine, such light-colored down, that you could scarcely see it, but on which you felt an irresistible desire to impress a shower of kisses.

Under the magnetism of my looks, she turned her head toward me, and then immediately looked down, while a slight dimpling of the flesh, the forerunner of a smile, also showed that fine, silky, pale down which the sun was gilding a little.

The calm river grew wider; the atmosphere was warm and perfectly still, but a murmur of life seemed to fill all space.

* Fly. A name given to the small steamboats on the Seine.

My neighbor raised her eyes again, and, this time, as I was still looking at her, she smiled, decidedly. She was charming, and in her passing glance I saw a thousand things of which I had hitherto been ignorant. I saw in it unknown depths, all the charm of tenderness, all the poetry which we dream of, all the happiness which we are continually in search of. I felt an insane longing to open my arms and to carry her off somewhere, so as to whisper the sweet music of words of love into her ears.

I was just going to speak to her when somebody touched me on the shoulder. Turning round in some surprise, I saw an ordinary looking man, who was neither young nor old, and who gazed at me sadly:

"I should like to speak to you," he said.

I made a grimace, which he no doubt saw, for he added:

"It is a matter of importance."

I got up, therefore, and followed him to the other end of the boat, and then he said:

"Monsieur, when winter comes, with its cold, wet, and snowy weather, your doctor says to you constantly: 'Keep your feet warm, guard against chills, colds, bronchitis, rheumatism, and pleurisy.'

"Then you are very careful, you wear flannel, a heavy great-coat, and thick shoes, but all this does not prevent you from passing two months in bed. But when spring returns, with its leaves and flowers, its warm, soft breezes, and its smell of the fields, causing you vague disquiet and causeless emotion, nobody says to you:

“‘Monsieur, beware of love! It is lying in ambush everywhere; it is watching for you at every corner; all its snares are laid, all its weapons are sharpened, all its guiles are prepared! Beware of love. Beware of love. It is more dangerous than brandy, bronchitis, or pleurisy! It never forgives, and makes everybody commit irreparable follies.’

“Yes, Monsieur, I say that the French government ought to put large public notices on the walls, with these words: ‘Return of spring. French citizens, beware of love’; just as they put: ‘Beware of paint.’

“However, as the government will not do this, I must supply its place, and I say to you: ‘Beware of love,’ for it is just going to seize you, and it is my duty to inform you of it, just as in Russia they inform anyone that his nose is frozen.”

I was much astonished at this individual, and assuming a dignified manner, I said:

“Really, Monsieur, you appear to me to be interfering in a matter which is no business of yours.”

He made an abrupt movement, and replied:

“Ah, Monsieur, Monsieur! If I see that a man is in danger of being drowned at a dangerous spot, ought I to let him perish? So just listen to my story, and you will see why I ventured to speak to you like this.

“It was about this time last year that it occurred. But, first of all, I must tell you that I am a clerk in the Admiralty, where our chiefs, the commissioners, take their gold lace as quill-driving officers seriously, and treat us like foretop men on board a ship. Well, from my office I could see a small bit of blue

sky and the swallows, and I felt inclined to dance among my portfolios.

“My yearning for freedom grew so intense, that, in spite of my repugnance, I went to see my chief, who was a short, bad-tempered man, who was always cross. When I told him that I was not well, he looked at me, and said: ‘I do not believe it, Monsieur, but be off with you! Do you think that any office can go on with clerks like you?’ I started at once, and went down the Seine. It was a day like this, and I took the *mouche* to go as far as Saint-Cloud. Ah! What a good thing it would have been if my chief had refused me permission to leave the office for the day!

“I seemed to expand in the sun. I loved it all; the steamer, the river, the trees, the houses, my fellow-passengers, everything. I felt inclined to kiss something, no matter what; it was love laying its snare. Presently, at the Trocadéro, a girl, with a small parcel in her hand, came on board and sat down opposite to me. She was certainly pretty; but it is surprising, Monsieur, how much prettier women seem to us when it is fine, at the beginning of the spring. Then they have an intoxicating charm, something quite peculiar about them. It is just like drinking wine after the cheese.

“I looked at her, and she also looked at me, but only occasionally, like that girl did at you, just now; but at last, by dint of looking at each other constantly, it seemed to me that we knew each other well enough to enter into conversation, and I spoke to her, and she replied. She was decidedly pretty and nice, and she intoxicated me, Monsieur!

"She got out at Saint-Cloud, and I followed her. She went and delivered her parcel, but when she returned, the boat had just started. I walked by her side, and the warmth of the air made us both sigh.

"'It would be very nice in the wood,' I said.

"'Indeed, it would!' she replied.

"'Shall we go there for a walk, Mademoiselle?'

"She gave me a quick, upward look, as if to see exactly what I was like, and then, after a little hesitation, she accepted my proposal, and soon we were there, walking side by side. Under the foliage, which was still rather thin, the tall, thick, bright, green grass was inundated by the sun and full of small insects making love to one another, and birds were singing in all directions. My companion began to jump and to run, intoxicated by the air and the smell of the country, and I ran and jumped behind her. How stupid we are at times, Monsieur!

"Then she wildly sang a thousand things; opera airs and the song of *Musette!* The song of *Musette!* How poetical it seemed to me, then! I almost cried over it. Ah! Those silly songs make us lose our heads; take my advice, never marry a woman who sings in the country, especially if she sings the song of *Musette!*

"She soon grew tired, and sat down on a grassy slope, and I sat down at her feet. I took her hands, her little hands, so marked with the needle, and they moved me. I said to myself: 'These are the sacred marks of toil.' Oh, Monsieur! do you know what those sacred marks of labor mean? They mean all the gossip of the workroom, the whispered blackguardism, the mind soiled by all the filth that is

talked; they mean lost chastity, foolish chatter, all the wretchedness of daily bad habits, all the narrowness of ideas which belongs to women of the lower orders, united in the girl whose sacred fingers bear *the sacred marks of toil*.

"Then we looked into each other's eyes for a long while. What power a woman's eye has! How it agitates us, how it invades our very being, takes possession of us, and dominates us. How profound it seems, how full of infinite promise! People call that looking into each other's souls! Oh! Monsieur, what humbug! If we could see into each other's souls, we should be more careful of what we did. However, I was caught, and crazy after her, and tried to take her into my arms, but she said: 'Hands off!' Then I threw myself down, and opened my heart to her, and poured out all the affection that was suffocating me, my head on her knees. She seemed surprised at my manner, and gave me a sidelong glance, as if to say: 'Ah! So that is the way women make a fool of you, old fellow! Very well, we will see.' In love, Monsieur, men are the artists, and women are the dealers.

"No doubt I could have won her, and I saw my own stupidity later, but what I wanted was not a woman's person, it was love, it was the ideal. I was sentimental, when I ought to have been using my time to a better purpose.

"As soon as she had had enough of my declarations of affection, she got up, and we returned to Saint-Cloud, but I did not leave her until we got to Paris. But she looked so sad as we were returning, that at last I asked her what was the matter.

"‘I am thinking,’ she replied, ‘that this has been one of those days of which we have but few in life.’

"And my heart beat as if it would break my ribs.

"I saw her on the following Sunday, and the next Sunday, and every Sunday. I took her to Bougival, Saint-Germain, Maison-Lafitte, Poissy; to every suburban resort of lovers.

"The little jade, in turn, pretended to love me, until, at last, I altogether lost my head, and three months later I married her.

"What can you expect, Monsieur, when a man is a clerk, living alone, without any relations, or anyone to advise him? You say to yourself: ‘How sweet life would be with a wife!’

"And so you get married, and she calls you names from morning till night, understands nothing, knows nothing, chatters continually, sings the song of *Musette* at the top of her voice (oh! that song of *Musette*, how tired one gets of it!); quarrels with the charcoal dealer, tells the porter all her domestic details, confides all the secrets of her bedroom to the neighbor's servant, discusses her husband with the tradespeople, and has her head so stuffed with stupid stories, with idiotic superstitions, with extraordinary ideas, and monstrous prejudices, that I—for what I have said, applies particularly to myself—shed tears of discouragement every time I talk to her."

He stopped, as he was rather out of breath, and very much moved. I looked at him, for I felt pity for this poor, artless devil, and I was just going to give him some sort of answer, when the boat stopped. We were at Saint-Cloud.

The little woman who had so taken my fancy got up in order to land. She passed close to me, and gave me a side glance and a furtive smile—one of those smiles that drive you wild; then she jumped on the landing-stage. I sprang forward to follow her, but my neighbor laid hold of my arm. I shook myself loose, however, whereupon he seized the skirt of my coat, and pulled me back, exclaiming:

“You shall not go! You shall not go!” in such a loud voice, that everybody turned round and laughed. I remained standing motionless and furious, but without venturing to face scandal and ridicule, and the steamboat started.

The little woman on the landing-stage looked at me as I went off with an air of disappointment, while my persecutor rubbed his hands and whispered to me:

“You must admit that I have done you a great service.”

A REPULSE



I WAS journeying to Turin, *via* Corsica. At Nice I took the steamer for Bastia and when we were fairly out at sea, I observed a young woman with a modest and gentle air, sitting on the deck watching the passengers, as I was.

I said to myself, "Ah, here is a diversion."

I sat down opposite her and began to study her, endeavoring, as one will under such circumstances, to determine her age, her position, and in short, who she was. I noted the various points of her face and figure, the turn of her ankle, the swell of her bust, the cut of her dress, the shape of her hand, which reveals the delicacy of the arm, and the fashioning of her ear, a thing which indicates origin far more accurately than any certificate of birth, which is always open to question.

I endeavored to catch the tones of her voice, the better to gain an insight into her nature and the inclinations of her heart. The tones of the voice and the little imperceptible shades of speech reveal to an

acute observer the mysterious texture of the soul, for the concord between thought and the organ which voices it is always perfect, although not often easy to detect. Thus I observed my neighbor attentively, watching for any signals and analyzing her pose in the hope that it would yield me some revelation of her.

She opened a little bag and took out a newspaper. I rubbed my hands. "Ah," thought I, "tell me what you read and I will tell you what you think."

She began at the leading article, with a little air of contentment and satisfaction. The name of the paper I could read clearly—"L'Echo de Paris." I found myself perplexed. She was reading a *chronique* by Scholl. The deuce! So she is an admirer of Scholl? She began to smile: ah, a Frenchwoman! Evidently not a prude, the dear girl! Very good. An admirer of Scholl,—yes, and she likes the Parisian spirit, the delicacy mingled with salt and pepper. A good sign! And now, said I, for final proof.

I went over and took a seat near her and began to read, with a show of interest, a volume of poetry which I had purchased on starting, "La Chanson d'Amour," by Felix Frank.

I noticed that she caught the name on the cover with a quick glance of her eye, as a bird on the wing will catch a fly. Several of the passengers walked about in front of us observing her. But she seemed deeply interested in her story. When she had finished she laid the paper down at her side.

I bowed and said to her, "Will you be good enough to allow me, Madame, to have a look at your paper?"

"With pleasure," she replied.

"Let me offer to you in return this volume of poems."

"Thank you. Is it amusing?"

I was a little puzzled at this question. You don't expect to be asked if a book of poetry is amusing. Still I replied:

"It is better than that. It is charming, delicate, and exceedingly artistic."

"Ah, then, let me see it."

She took the book, opened it, and turned over the pages with a little air of surprise, which showed she was not in the habit of reading poetry.

One moment she appeared affected, at the next she smiled, but with a very different smile from that with which she had read her journal.

"Do you like it?" I asked her suddenly.

"Yes, in a way," she answered, "but I prefer something gay, something very gay. I am not in the least sentimental." And so we entered into a conversation. I learned that she was the wife of a captain of dragoons garrisoned at Ajaccio, and that she was on her way to rejoin her husband. For a moment I thought that she did not care for him; that she liked him, perhaps, but in a reserved sort of a way, as a woman may still like a man whom she has once loved, but a man who has failed to come up to the standard of the hopes and wishes she had formed for him in the early days of their betrothal.

He had taken her from garrison to garrison, through a number of small out-of-the-way towns, each duller than the last, and now he had sent for her to this island, which must be positively dreadful!

No! life was certainly not entirely delightful for everyone! She would have preferred greatly to remain with her parents at Lyons, where she knew everybody. But now she was obliged to go to Corsica. The War Minister, indeed, was not very kind to her husband, who nevertheless had a splendid record of service.

Then we went on to talk of places where she would have liked to live.

"Do you like Paris?" I asked.

"Like Paris?" she exclaimed, "is it possible you can ask me such a question?" and she began to speak of Paris with such ardor, such enthusiasm, and such exaggerated longing, that I said to myself, "There is the chord to strike!"

She adored Paris from afar, with the curious longing and passionate admiration of a provincial—the impatient infatuation of a caged bird who looks toward the wood all day, from the window where he hangs.

She began to question me, stammering in her eagerness; she wanted to learn everything in five minutes. She knew the names of everyone of note, and of many others of whom I had never even heard.

"How is M. Gounod?" she cried, "and M. Sardou? Oh! how I delight in Monsieur Sardou's plays! how bright and gay they are! Every time that I see one, I dream of it for the next eight days! I have read, too, one of Monsieur Daudet's books which pleased me immensely; 'Sapho,' do you know it? Is M. Daudet a nice fellow? Have you seen him? And M. Zola—what do you think of him? If you only knew how I cried over 'Germinal!' Do you remember the poor little child who died without a

light? How dreadful that was! It almost made me ill. It was anything but a laughing matter. I have read a work of Monsieur Bourget's, also: 'A Cruel Enigma.' I have a cousin who lost her head so completely over the book that she actually wrote to Monsieur Bourget about it! I found it too poetical myself; I prefer something more amusing. And do you know Monsieur Grevin? and M. Coquelin? and M. Damala? And M. Rochefort?—they say he is extremely witty! Then there is Monsieur de Cassagnac; it seems as though he is always fighting."

* * * * *

At the end of about an hour her questions were nearly exhausted; and having satisfied her curiosity in the most fanciful manner, I thought it was now my turn to talk. I began to tell her stories of the world of Paris, the world of fashion; and she listened with all her ears and all her heart. Ah, she must have gained a curious idea of the fine ladies of Paris!

I told her of nothing but doubtful adventures, of clandestine meetings, of speedy conquests, and passionate defeats. Every now and then she asked, "Is it *really* like this in the world you speak of?"

I would smile mischievously and say: "Well, it is only the middle classes—people in trade—that lead a narrow and monotonous life, out of respect for virtue, a virtue for which no one gives them credit!"

And then I endeavored, by ironical, philosophic, and boasting speeches in turn, to strike at everything good and virtuous.

I made a mock of those poor creatures who allow themselves to grow old without ever having known

anything that was sweet and tender, never having tasted the delicious pleasures of stolen kisses; and that because they happened to be married to some good stick of a husband, whose conjugal reserve let them drift on until they died in ignorance of the best of life.

Then I recounted all sorts of anecdotes and intrigues which I assured her were known to all the world. And as a sort of refrain came stories discreetly praising the pleasures to be derived from forbidden affections, or sensations stolen like fruit by the way and forgotten as soon as tasted.

The night came on—a night still and warm. The great vessel, trembling from the beating of her engines, glided over the water, while overhead the violet heaven, like an immense dome, was starred with fire.

The young woman no longer spoke; she breathed slowly, and sighed now and again. Suddenly she rose.

"I am going to bed, so I will wish you good night," she said, and shook hands with me.

I knew that the following evening she would have to take the stage which goes from Bastia to Ajaccio across the mountains, and that is all night *en route*.

"Good night, Madame," I replied, and I in turn sought my berth.

Now, I had taken all of the places in the stage for the next night; all four for myself alone. We arrived at Bastia late in the afternoon of the following day. I had seen nothing of my traveling companion since the evening before. Collecting my

luggage, I prepared to take my place in the stage and settle myself to the journey. Just as I was climbing into the tumble-down old vehicle, which was about to start, the conductor came up and asked if I would consent to give up one seat to a lady.

"What lady?" I inquired, rather brusquely.

"The wife of an officer, who is going to Ajaccio," replied the conductor.

"Oh! very well, you may tell the lady that I offer her a seat with pleasure."

The conductor went off, and a few minutes later returned accompanied by the young woman, who said she had been asleep all day. She apologized for taking the place, and thanked me prettily as she got in.

The carriage was a sort of box tightly closed, only admitting daylight through the two doors. There we were, *tête-à-tête* inside.

The carriage swung off at a sharp trot, and was soon toiling up the mountain. A fresh powerful smell of aromatic herbs came in through the lowered window-sash. It was that strong odor which the island of Corsica seems to spread all round herself, to such a distance that mariners recognize it almost before sighting the land. It is as penetrating as the fragrant mist,—the damp of the green earth impregnated with perfume, which the sun has drawn from her, and thrown to the passing wind.

I returned to the subject of Paris, and she again began to listen with eager attention.

Night had closed in. I could no longer see anything, not even the spot of white which a short time before had indicated the whereabouts of my compan-

ion's face. Only the driver's lantern lighted up the four horses, as they climbed the steep path. At times the noise of a torrent tumbling down in the rocks reached us, mingled with the sound of a far-off sheep-bell, then died away in the distance behind.

Presently I advanced my foot very softly and encountered hers which she did not withdraw. For a time I waited without moving. Then all of a sudden, I changed my tactics and spoke in tender tones of the sweetness of friendship and true affection. Getting no reply, I stretched out my hand and gently touched hers. She did not move.

Talking softly all the time, I bent my head close to hers, almost touching her ear and mouth. I could hear her heart beating loud and quickly; then leaning forward I touched her neck lightly with my lips, feeling sure she would make no objection, so sure in fact that I would willingly have wagered any amount on the certainty.

But suddenly she started up as though she had been awakened from sleep, with so violent a start that I was nearly thrown against the other end of the carriage. Then before I could understand, reflect, or think of anything, I received five or six terrible cuffs, and a perfect hail of sharp blows from her fist, coming from every direction. I could not avoid them being quite unable to distinguish anything in the dense darkness in which this encounter took place.

I put up my hands endeavoring to seize her by the arm, but in vain. At last, not knowing what to do, I turned round, leaving only my shoulders exposed to her furious attack and hiding my head in a corner of the cushions. She appeared to understand,

from the sound of the blows, perhaps, my despairing maneuver, and suddenly ceased hitting me. After a few moments she regained her corner, where she sat sobbing and crying most bitterly for nearly an hour.

I got back into my seat, much troubled and terribly ashamed. I wanted to say something to her, but what could be said? To excuse myself would be stupid. What could anyone have said? Nothing. By and by, she began to cry more softly, every now and then heaving deep sighs, which pierced my very heart. I longed to console her, to embrace her as one would an unhappy child, and ask her forgiveness on my knees. But I dared not.

Such situations are intensely trying!

By degrees she became calm, and each of us sat in a corner silent and immovable, while the stage jogged on, only stopping now and then to change horses. When the bright rays of the stable-lantern fell on us we would both hastily close our eyes, lest we should see each other's faces.

Then we would start off again; and all the time the fragrant perfumed air of the Corsican mountains caressed our cheeks and lips, stimulating us like wine.

"Sacristi!" thought I, "What a charming journey this would be if—if my companion were not such a fool!"

But daylight slowly crept in on us, the pale day of early dawn. I glanced at my neighbor; she appeared to be asleep. At length the sun rose over the mountains irradiating an immense blue gulf, surrounded by huge hills topped with granite. On the shore of this gulf, still bathed in shadow, I could see

the silvery gleam of a white town, nestling close to the water's edge.

Soon the lady roused herself and opened her eyes, which were quite red; then her lips parted in a yawn, as though she had been sleeping a long time.

Looking up, she flushed and asked falteringly, "Shall we soon be there?"

"Yes, Madame, in less than an hour," I replied.

"It is very fatiguing to pass the night traveling," she said, looking away distantly.

"Yes," I assented, "it makes one ache all over."

"Above all, after a crossing."

"Yes, indeed."

"Is that Ajaccio before us?"

"Yes, Madame."

"I wish we had arrived."

"I can understand that," I replied.

Her voice sounded slightly troubled, her manner was embarrassed, and her glance shy. Nevertheless she seemed to have forgotten everything!

How I admired her. What diplomatists these women are!

We reached our destination in about an hour. A great dragoon with the figure of a Hercules was standing in front of the coach-office, waving a handkerchief as he saw the stage approaching. No sooner had it stopped than the young woman sprang eagerly into his arms and kissed him twenty times at least, crying:

"You are well? How I have longed to see you again."

My trunk had already been taken out and I was discreetly withdrawing, when she called to me:

"Oh, Monsieur, you are not going without wishing me good-bye!"

"Madame," I murmured, "I shall be intruding."

Then she turned to her husband, "Darling, do thank this gentleman. He has been charming to me during the whole journey. He even offered me a place in the stage which he had taken for himself. I have been most fortunate in meeting such a pleasant companion."

Her husband held out his hand, and thanked me warmly. The young woman looked at me curiously. As for myself, I must have looked very cheap.

SOLITUDE



WE HAD been dining at the house of a friend, and the dinner had been very gay. After it broke up, one of the party, an old friend, said to me:

"Let us take a stroll in the Champs-Élysées."

I agreed, and we went out, slowly walking up the long promenade, under trees hardly yet covered with leaves. There was hardly a sound, save that confused and constant murmur which Paris makes. A fresh breeze fanned our faces, and a legion of stars were scattered over the black sky like a golden powder.

My companion said to me:

"I do not know why, but I breathe better here at night than anywhere else. It seems to me that my thoughts are enlarged. I have at times, a sort of glimmering in my soul, that makes me believe, for a second, that the divine secret of things is about to be discovered. Then the window is closed, and my vision is ended."

From time to time we saw two shadows glide along the length of the thickets; then we passed a bench, where two people, seated side by side, made but one black spot.

My friend murmured:

“Poor things! They do not inspire me with disgust, but with an immense pity. Among all the mysteries of human life there is one which I have penetrated; our great torment in this existence comes from the fact that we are eternally alone—all our efforts and all our actions are directed toward escaping this solitude. Those two lovers there on the benches in the open air are seeking, as we—as all creatures are seeking, to make their isolation cease, if only for a minute or less. They are living and always will live alone; and we also.

“This is more or less apparent to all of us. For some time I have endured this abominable pain of having understood, of having discovered the frightful solitude in which I live, and I know that nothing can make it cease—nothing. Do you hear? Whatever we may attempt, whatever we may do, whatever may be the misery of our hearts, the appeal of our lips, the clasp of our arms, we are always alone. I have asked you to walk to-night, so that I shall not have to enter my own house, because now I suffer horribly from the solitude of my home. What good does it do me? I speak to you, you listen to me, yet we are both alone, side by side but alone. You understand?

“‘Blessed are the poor in spirit,’ say the Scriptures. They have the illusion of happiness. They do not feel our solitary misery, they do not wander, as

I do, through life, without contact save of elbows, without joy save the egotistic satisfaction of understanding, of seeing, of divining, and of suffering eternally from the knowledge of our never-ending isolation.

"You think me slightly deranged—do you not? Listen to me. Since I have felt the solitude of my being, it seems to me that I am daily sinking more deeply into a dark vault, whose sides I cannot find, whose end I do not know, and which, perhaps, has no end. I sink without anyone with me, or around me, without any living person making this same gloomy journey. This vault is life. Sometimes I hear noises, voices, cries. I timidly advance toward these confused sounds. But I never know exactly from whom they come; I never meet anybody, I never find another hand in this darkness that surrounds me. Do you understand?

"Some men have occasionally divined this frightful suffering. De Musset has written:

"'Who comes? Who calls me? No one.
I am alone. One o'clock strikes.
O Solitude! O Misery!'

But with him there is only a passing doubt, and not a definite certainty as with me. He was a poet; he peopled life with fantasies, with dreams. He was never really alone. I—I am alone.

"Gustave Flaubert, one of the great unfortunates of this world, because he was one of the great lights, wrote to a friend this despairing phrase: 'We are all in a desert. Nobody understands anybody.'

"No, nobody understands anybody—whatever one thinks, whatever one says, whatever one attempts. Does the earth know what passes in those stars that are hurled like a spark of fire across the firmament—so far that we perceive only the splendor of some? Think of the innumerable army of others lost in infinitude—so near to each other that they form perhaps a whole, as the molecules of a body!

"Well, man does not know what passes in another man any more. We are farther from one another than the stars, and far more isolated, because thought is unfathomable.

"Do you know anything more frightful than this constant contact with beings that we cannot penetrate? We love one another as if we were fettered, very close, with extended arms, without succeeding in reaching one another. A torturing need of union hampers us, but all our efforts remain barren, our abandonment useless, our confidences unfruitful, our embraces powerless, our caresses vain. When we wish to join each other, our sudden emotions make us only clash against each other.

"I never feel myself more alone than when I open my heart to some friend, because I then better understand the insuperable obstacle. He is there, my friend; I see his clear eyes above me, but the soul behind them I do not see. He listens to me. What is he thinking? Yes, what *is* he thinking? You do not understand this torment! He hates me, perhaps,—or scorns me,—or mocks me! He reflects upon what I have said; he judges me, he rails at me, he condemns me, and considers me either very mediocre or a fool.

"How am I to know what he thinks? How am I to know whether he loves me as I love him, and what is at work in that little round head? What a mystery is the unknown thought of a being, the hidden and independent thought, that we can neither know nor control, neither command nor conquer!

"And I! I have wished in vain to give myself up entirely; to open all the doors of my soul, and I do not succeed in giving myself up. I still remain in the depth, the very depth, the secret abode of me, where no one can penetrate. No one can discover it, or enter there, because no one resembles me, because no one understands anyone.

"You, at least, understand me at this moment; no: you think I am mad! You examine me; you shrink from me! You ask yourself: 'What's the matter with him to-night?' But if you succeed in seizing, in divining, one day, my horrible and subtle suffering, come to me and say only: 'I have understood you!' and you will make me happy, for a second, perhaps.

"Women make me still more conscious of my solitude. Misery! Misery! How I have suffered through women; because they, more than men, have often given me the illusion of not being alone!

"When one falls in love it seems as though one expands. A superhuman felicity envelops you! Do you know why? Do you know why you feel then this sensation of exceeding happiness? It is simply because one imagines himself no longer alone. Isolation, the abandonment of the human being seems to cease. What an error!

"More tormented even than we, by this eternal

need of love which gnaws at our solitary heart, are women, the great delusion and the dream.

"You know those delicious hours passed face to face with a being with long hair, charming features, and a look that excites us to love. What delirium misleads our mind! What illusion carries us away! Does it not seem that presently our souls shall form but one? But this 'presently' never comes; and, after weeks of waiting, of hope, and of deceptive joy, you find yourself again, one day, more alone than you have ever been before.

"After each kiss, after each embrace, the isolation is increased. And how frightfully one suffers!

"Has not Sully Prudhomme written:

"Caresses are only restless transports,
Fruitless attempts of poor love which essay
The impossible union of souls by the bodies.'

"And then—good-bye. It is over. One hardly recognizes the woman who has been everything to us for a moment of life, and whose thoughts, intimate and commonplace, undoubtedly, we have never known.

"At the very hour when it would seem, in that mysterious accord of beings, in the complete intermingling of ideas and of aspirations, that you were sounding the very depth of her soul, one word—one word only, sometimes—will reveal your error, will show you, like a flash of lightning in the night, the black abyss between you.

"And still, that which is best in the world is to pass a night near a woman you love, without speaking, completely happy in the sole sensation of her

presence. Ask no more, for two beings have never yet been united.

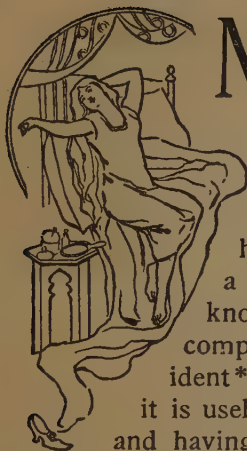
"As to myself, now, I have closed my soul. I tell no more to anybody what I believe, what I think, or what I love. Knowing myself condemned to this horrible solitude, I look upon things without expressing my opinion. What matter to me opinions, quarrels, pleasures, or beliefs! Being unable to participate with anyone, I have withdrawn myself from all. My invisible self lives unexplored. I have common phrases for answers to the questions of each day, and a smile which says 'Yes,' when I do not even wish to take the trouble of speaking. Do you understand?"

We had traversed the long avenue to the Arc de Triomphe, and had then walked back to the Place de la Concorde, for he had said all this slowly, adding many other things which I no longer remember.

He stopped, and stretching his arm toward the great granite obelisk standing on the pavement of Paris, losing its long Egyptian profile in the night of the stars—an exiled monument, bearing on its side the history of its country written in strange signs—said brusquely: "Look—we are all like that stone."

Then he left me without adding a word. Was he intoxicated? Was he mad? Was he wise? I do not yet know. Sometimes it seems to me that he was right; sometimes it seems to me that he had lost his mind.

THE MAN WITH THE BLUE EYES



MONSIEUR PIERRE AGÉNOR DE VARGNES, the Examining Magistrate, was the exact opposite of a practical joker. He was dignity, staidness, correctness personified. As a sedate man, he was quite incapable of being guilty, even in his dreams, of anything resembling a practical joke, however remotely. I know nobody to whom he could be compared, unless it be the present president* of the French Republic. I think it is useless to carry the analogy any further, and having said thus much, it will be easily understood that a cold shiver passed through me when I heard the following.

At about eight o'clock, one morning last winter, as he was leaving the house to go to the Palais de Justice, his footman handed him a card, on which was printed:

DOCTOR JAMES FERDINAND,
Member of the Academy of Medicine,
PORT-AU-PRINCE,
Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

* Jules Grévy.

At the bottom of the card, there was written in pencil: "From Lady Frogère."

Monsieur de Vargnes knew the lady very well. She was a very agreeable Creole from Haïti, whom he had met in many drawing-rooms, and, on the other hand, though the doctor's name did not awaken any recollections in him, his quality and titles alone demanded the courtesy of an interview, however short it might be. Therefore, although he was in a hurry to get out, Monsieur de Vargnes told the footman to show in his early visitor, but to tell him beforehand that his master was much pressed for time, as he had to go to the Law Courts.

When the doctor came in, in spite of his usual imperturbability, the magistrate could not restrain a movement of surprise, for the doctor presented the strange anomaly of being a negro of the purest, blackest type, with the eyes of a white man—of a man from the North—pale, cold, clear, blue eyes. His surprise increased, when, after a few words of excuse for an untimely visit, the doctor added, with an enigmatical smile:

"My eyes surprise you, do they not? I was sure that they would, and, to tell you the truth, I came here in order that you might look at them well, and never forget them."

His smile, and his words, even more than his smile, seemed to be those of a madman. He spoke very softly, with that childish, lisping voice which is peculiar to negroes, and his mysterious, almost menacing, words consequently sounded all the more as if they were uttered at random by a man bereft of reason. But the doctor's looks, the looks of those

pale, cold, clear, blue eyes, were certainly not those of a madman. They clearly expressed menace, yes, menace, as well as irony, and above all, implacable ferocity, and their glance was like a flash of lightning, which one could never forget.

"I have seen," Monsieur de Vargnes used to say, when speaking about it, "the looks of many murderers, but in none of them have I ever observed such a depth of crime, and of impudent security in crime."

And this impression was so strong that Monsieur de Vargnes thought he was the victim of some hallucination, especially as when he spoke about his eyes, the doctor continued with a smile, and in his most childish accents:

"Of course, Monsieur, you cannot understand what I am saying to you, and I must beg your pardon for it. To-morrow you will receive a letter which will explain it all to you, but, first of all, it was necessary that I should let you have a good, a careful look at my eyes, my eyes, which are myself, my only and true self, as you will see."

With these words, and with a polite bow, the doctor went out, leaving Monsieur de Vargnes extremely surprised, and a prey to doubt. He said to himself: "Is he merely a madman? The fierce expression and the criminal depths of his looks are perhaps caused merely by the extraordinary contrast between his fierce looks and his pale eyes."

And absorbed in these thoughts, Monsieur de Vargnes unfortunately allowed several minutes to elapse. Then he thought to himself suddenly:

"No, I am not the sport of any hallucination,

and this is no case of an optical phenomenon. This man is evidently some terrible criminal, and I have altogether failed in my duty in not arresting him myself at once, illegally, even at the risk of my life."

The judge ran downstairs in pursuit of the doctor, but it was too late; he had disappeared. In the afternoon, he called on Madame de Frogère, to ask her whether she could tell him anything about the matter. She, however, did not know the negro doctor in the least, and was even able to assure him that he was a fictitious personage, for, as she was well acquainted with the upper classes in Haïti, she knew that the Academy of Medicine at Port-au-Prince had no doctor of that name among its members. As Monsieur de Vargnes persisted, and gave descriptions of the doctor, especially mentioning his extraordinary eyes, Madame de Frogère began to laugh, and said:

"You have certainly had to do with a hoaxer, my dear Monsieur. The eyes which you have described are certainly those of a white man, and the individual must have been painted."

On thinking it over, Monsieur de Vargnes remembered that the doctor had nothing of the negro about him but his black skin, his woolly hair and beard, and his way of speaking, which was easily imitated. He had not the characteristic, undulating walk. Perhaps, after all, he was only a practical joker, and during the whole day, Monsieur de Vargnes took refuge in that view, which rather wounded his dignity as a man of consequence, but appeased his scruples as a magistrate.

The next day, he received the promised letter, which was written, as well as addressed, in characters cut out of the newspapers. It was as follows:

"MONSIEUR:

"Doctor James Ferdinand does not exist, but the man whose eyes you saw does, and you will certainly recognize his eyes. This man has committed two crimes, for which he does not feel any remorse, but, as he is a psychologist, he is afraid of some day yielding to the irresistible temptation of confessing his crimes. You know better than anyone (and that is your most powerful aid), with what imperious force criminals, especially intellectual ones, feel this temptation. That great poet, Edgar Allan Poe, has written masterpieces on this subject, which express the truth exactly, but he has omitted to mention the last phenomenon, which I will tell you. Yes, I, a criminal, feel a terrible wish for somebody to know of my crimes, and when this requirement is satisfied, when my secret has been revealed to a confidant, I shall be tranquil for the future, and be freed from this demon of perversity, which only tempts us once. Well! Now that is accomplished. You shall have my secret: from the day that you recognize me by my eyes, you will try and find out what I am guilty of, and how I was guilty, and you will discover it, being a master of your profession, which, by-the-bye, has procured you the honor of having been chosen by me to bear the weight of this secret, which now is shared by us, and by us two alone. I say, advisedly, *by us two alone*. You could not, as a matter of fact, prove the reality of this secret to anyone, unless I were to confess it, and I defy you to obtain my public confession, as I have confessed it to you, *and without danger to myself*."

Three months later, Monsieur de Vargnes met Monsieur X — at an evening party, and at first sight, and without the slightest hesitation, he recognized in him those very pale, very cold, and very clear blue eyes, eyes which it was impossible to forget.

The man himself remained perfectly impassive, so that Monsieur de Vargnes was forced to say to himself:

"Probably I am the sport of an hallucination at this moment, or else there are two pairs of eyes that are perfectly similar, in the world. And what eyes! Can it be possible?"

The magistrate instituted inquiries into his life, and he discovered this, which removed all his doubts.

Five years previously, Monsieur X—— had been a very poor but very brilliant medical student, who, although he never took his doctor's degree, had already made himself remarkable by his microbiological researches.

A young and very rich widow had fallen in love with him and married him. She had one child by her first marriage, and in the space of six months, first the child and then the mother died of typhoid fever. Thus Monsieur X—— had inherited a large fortune, in due form, and without any possible dispute. Everybody said that he had attended to the two patients with the utmost devotion. Now, were these two deaths the two crimes mentioned in his letter?

But then, Monsieur X—— must have poisoned his two victims with the microbes of typhoid fever, which he had skillfully cultivated in them, so as to make the disease incurable, even by the most devoted care and attention. Why not?

"Do you really believe it?" I asked Monsieur de Vargnes.

"Absolutely," he replied. "And the most terrible thing about it is that the villain is right when he defies me to force him to confess his crime publicly, for I see no means of obtaining a confession, none whatever. For a moment I thought of magnetism,

but who could magnetize that man with those pale, cold, bright eyes? With such eyes, he would force the magnetizer to denounce himself as the culprit."

And then he said, with a deep sigh:

"Ah! Formerly there was something good about justice!"

When he saw my inquiring looks, he added in a firm and perfectly convinced voice:

"Formerly, justice had torture at its command."

"Upon my word," I replied, with all an author's unconscious and simple egotism, "it is quite certain that without the torture, this strange tale will have no conclusion, and that is very unfortunate, so far as regards the story I intended to make out of it."

THE OLD MAID



COUNT EUSTACHE D'ETCHEGORRY'S solitary country house had the appearance of a poor man's home, where people do not have enough to eat every day in the week, where the bottles are more frequently filled at the pump than in the cellar, and where they wait until it is quite dark before lighting the candles.

It was an old and miserable building; the walls were crumbling to pieces, the grated iron gates were eaten away by rust, the holes in the broken windows had been mended with old newspapers, but the ancestral portraits which hung against the walls showed that it was no tiller of the soil, nor miserable back-bent laborer whose strength had gradually worn out, that lived there. Great, knotty elm-trees sheltered it, as with a tall, green screen, and a large garden, full of wild rose-trees, of straggling plants, and of sickly looking vegetables, which sprang up half withered from the sandy soil, stretched down to the bank of the river.

From the house, one could hear the monotonous sound of the water, which at one time rushed yellow and impetuous toward the sea, and then again flowed back, as if driven by some invisible force toward the town, which could be seen in the distance, with its pointed spires, its ramparts, its ships at anchor by the side of the quay, and its citadel built on the top of a hill.

A strong smell of the sea came from the offing, mingled with the smell of pine logs, and of the large nets with great pieces of sea-weed clinging to them, which were drying in the sun.

Why had Monsieur d'Etchegorry, who did not like the country, who was of a sociable rather than of a solitary nature, for he never walked alone, but associated with the retired officers who lived there, and frequently played game after game of piquet at the *café*, when he was in town—why had he buried himself in such a solitary place, by the side of a dusty road at Boucau, a village close to the town, where on Sundays the soldiers took off their tunics, and sat in their shirt-sleeves in the public-houses, drinking the thin wine of the country, and teasing the girls?

What secret reason he had for selling the mansion which he had possessed at Bayonne, close to the bishop's palace, and condemning his daughter, a girl of nineteen, to such a dull, listless, solitary life, counting the minutes far from everybody, as if she had been a nun, no one knew. Most people said that he had lost immense sums in gambling, and had wasted his fortune and ruined his credit in doubtful speculations. They wondered whether he still regretted the tender, sweet woman whom he had lost, who died

one evening, after years of suffering, like a church lamp whose oil has been consumed to the last drop. Was he seeking for perfect oblivion, for that Nirvana in nature, in which a man becomes enervated and enveloped as with a moist, warm cloth? How could he be satisfied with such an existence—with the bad cooking, and the careless, untidy ways of a charwoman, and with the shabby clothes, discolored by use, that he had to wear?

His numerous relations had been anxious about it at first, had tried to cure him of his apparent hypochondria, and to persuade him to do something. But as he was obstinate, avoided them, rejected their friendly offers with arrogance and self-sufficiency, even his brothers had abandoned and almost renounced him. All their affection had been transferred to the poor child who shared his solitude, and endured all her wretchedness with the resignation of a saint. Thanks to them, she had a few gleams of pleasure in her exile, was not dressed like a beggar girl, but received invitations, and appeared here and there at some ball, concert, or tennis party. The girl was extremely grateful to them for it all, although she would much have preferred that nobody should have held out a helping hand to her, but have left her to her dull life, without any day dreams or home-sickness, so that she might grow used to her lot, and day by day lose all that remained to her of her pride of race and of her youth.

With her sensitive and proud mind, she felt that she was not treated exactly as others were, in society, that people showed her either too much pity or too much indifference, that they knew all about her home

life of undeserved poverty, and that in the folds of her muslin dress they could smell the mustiness of her dwelling. If she was animated, or buoyed up with secret hopes in her heart, if there was a smile on her lips, and light in her eyes when she went out at the gate, and the horses carried her off to town at a rapid trot, she was all the more low-spirited and tearful when she returned home. She used to shut herself up in her room and find fault with her destiny, declaring to herself that she would imitate her father, show relatives and friends politely out, with a passive and resigned gesture, and make herself so unpleasant and embarrassing that they would grow tired of it in the end, would leave long intervals between their visits, and finally would not come to see her at all, but would turn away from her, as from some hospital where incurable patients were dying.

Nevertheless, the older the count grew, the more the supplies in the small country house diminished, and the more painful and harder existence became. If a morsel of bread was left uneaten on the table, if an unexpected dish was served up at table, if she put a piece of ribbon into her hair, he used to heap violent, spiteful reproaches on her, torrents of rage and vituperation and violent threats, like those of a madman who is tormented by some fixed idea. Monsieur d'Etchegorry had dismissed the servant and engaged a charwoman, whom he intended to pay merely by small sums on account, and he used to go to market with a basket on his arm.

He locked up every morsel of food, used to count the lumps of sugar and charcoal, and bolted himself in all day long in a room that was larger than the

rest, which for a long time had served as a drawing-room. At times he would be rather more gentle, as if he were troubled by vague thoughts, and used to say to his daughter, in an agonized voice, and trembling all over: "You will never ask me for any accounts, will you? You will never demand your mother's fortune?"

She always gave him the required promise, did not worry him with any questions, nor give vent to any complaints, and, thinking of her cousins, who would have good dowries, were growing up happily and peacefully amid careful and affectionate surroundings and beautiful old furniture, and were certain to be loved and to be married some day, she asked herself why fate was so cruel to some and so kind to others, and what she had done to deserve such disfavor.

Marie-des-Anges d'Etchegorry, without being absolutely pretty, possessed all the charm of her age, and everybody liked her. She was as tall and slim as a lily, with beautiful, fine, soft, fair hair, and eyes of a dark, undecided color, which reminded one of those springs in the depths of the forests, in which a ray of the sun is but rarely reflected—mirrors which changed now to violet, then to the color of leaves, but most frequently were of a velvety blackness. Her whole being exhaled the freshness of childhood, and an air that could not be described, but which was pleasant, wholesome, and frank.

She lived on through the years, growing up faithful to the man who might have given her his name, honorable, having resisted temptations and snares, worthy of the motto which used to be engraved on

the tombs of Roman matrons before the Cæsars: "She spun wool, and stayed at home."

When she was just twenty-one, Marie-des-Anges fell in love, and her beautiful, dark, restless eyes for the first time became illuminated with a look of dreamy happiness. For some one seemed to have noticed her; he waltzed with her more frequently than he did with the other girls, spoke to her in a low voice, dangled at her petticoats, and discomposed her so much that she flushed deeply as soon as she heard the sound of his voice.

His name was André de Gèdre; he had just returned from Sénégal, where after several months of daily fighting in the desert, he had won his sub-lieutenant's epaulets.

With his thin, sunburnt, yellow face, looking awkward in his tight coat, in which his broad shoulders could not expand themselves comfortably, and in which his arms, accustomed to cut right and left, were cramped in tight sleeves, he looked like one of those pirates of old, who used to scour the seas, pillaging, killing, hanging their prisoners to the yard-arms, and ready to engage a whole fleet, and who returned to port laden with booty, and occasionally with waifs and strays picked up at sea.

He belonged to a race of buccaneers or of heroes, according to the breeze which swelled his sails and carried him north or south. Over head and ears in debt, reduced to discounting doubtful legacies, to gambling at casinos, and to mortgaging the few acres of land that he still owned at much below their value, he nevertheless managed to make a pretty good figure in his hand-to-mouth existence. He never gave

in, never showed the blows that he had received, and waited for the last struggle in a state of blissful inactivity, while he sought for renewed strength and philosophy from the caressing lips of women.

Marie-des-Anges seemed to him to be a toy which he could play with as he liked. She had the flavor of unripe fruit; left to herself, and sentimental as she was, she would only offer a very brief resistance to his attacks, would soon yield to his will, and when he was tired of her and threw her off, she would bow to the inevitable and would not worry him with violent scenes, or stand in his way with threats on her lips. And so he was kind, and used to wheedle her, and by degrees enveloped her in the meshes of a net which continually hemmed her in closer and closer. He gained entire possession of her heart and confidence, without expressing any wish or making any promises, and managed so to establish his influence over her, that she did nothing but what he wished.

Long before Monsieur de Gèdre had addressed any passionate words to her, or any of those avowals which immediately introduce warmth and danger into a flirtation, Marie-des-Anges had betrayed herself with the candor of a little girl, who does not think she is doing any wrong, and cannot hide what she thinks, what she is dreaming about, and the tenderness which lies hidden at the bottom of her heart. She no longer felt that horror of life which had formerly tortured her. She no longer felt herself alone, as she had felt formerly—so alone, so lost, even among her own people, that everything had become indifferent to her.

It was very pleasant and soothing to love and to think that she was loved, to have a furtive and secret understanding with another heart, to imagine that he was thinking of her at the same time that she was thinking of him, to shelter herself timidly under his protection, to feel more unhappy each time she left him, and to experience greater happiness every time they met.

She wrote him long letters, which she did not venture to send him when they were written, for she was timid and feared that he would make fun of them. But she sang the whole day through like a lark that is intoxicated with the sun, so that Monsieur Etchegorry scarcely recognized her any longer.

Soon they made appointments together in some secluded spot, meeting for a few minutes in the aisles of the cathedral and behind the ramparts, or on the promenade of the *Alleés Marinés*, which was always dark, on account of the dense foliage.

And at last, one evening in June, when the sky was so studded with stars that it might have been taken for the triumphal route of some sovereign, strewn with precious stones and rare flowers, Monsieur de Gèdre went into the large neglected garden.

Marie-des-Anges was waiting for him in a somber walk, with witch-elms on either side, listening for the least noise, looking at the closed windows of the house, and nearly fainting, as much from fear as from happiness. They spoke in a low voice. She was close to him; he must have heard the beating of her heart, into which he had cast the first seeds of love, and he put his arms round her and clasped her gently, as if she had been some little bird that he was

afraid of hurting, but which he did not wish to escape.

She no longer knew what she was doing, but was in a state of entire, intense, supreme happiness. She shivered, and yet something burning seemed to permeate her whole being under her skin, from the nape of her neck to her feet, like a stream of flaming spirit. She would not have had the strength to disengage herself, or to take a step forward, so she leaned her head instinctively and very tenderly against André's shoulder. He kissed her hair, touched her forehead with his lips, and at last put them against hers. The girl felt as if she were going to die and remained inert and motionless, with her eyes full of tears.

He came nearly every evening for two months. She had not the courage to repel him or to speak to him seriously of the future, and could not understand why he had not yet asked her father for her hand, and had not fulfilled his former promises, until one Sunday, as she was coming from High Mass, walking on before her cousins, Marie-des-Anges heard the following words, from a group in which André was standing. He was the speaker:

"Oh! no," he said, "you are altogether mistaken; I should never do anything so foolish. One does not marry a girl without a half-penny; one takes her for one's mistress."

The unhappy girl mastered her feelings, went down the steps of the porch quite steadily, but feeling utterly crushed, as if by the news of some terrible disaster, and joined the servant, who was waiting for her, to accompany her back to Boucau.

The effect of what she had heard was to give her a serious illness, and for some time she hovered between life and death, consumed and wasted by a violent fever. When, after a fortnight's suffering, she grew convalescent, and looked at herself in the glass, she recoiled, as if she had been face to face with an apparition, for there was nothing left of her former self.

Her eyes were dull, her cheeks pale and hollow, and there were white streaks in her silky, light hair. Why had she not succumbed to her illness? Why had destiny reserved her for such a trial, and increased the unhappiness of her lot with disappointed hopes? But when that rebellious feeling was over, she accepted her cross, fell into a state of ardent devotion, became crystallized in the torpor of old-womanhood, tried with all her might to rid her memory of any recollections that had become incrustated in it, and to put a thick black veil between herself and the past.

She never walked in the garden now, never went to Bayonne, and would have liked to have choked and beaten herself, when, in spite of her efforts and of her will, she remembered her lost happiness, and when some sensual feeling and a longing for past pleasures agitated her body afresh.

That lasted for four years, which finished and altogether destroyed her good looks. She had gained the figure and the appearance of an old maid, when her father suddenly died, just as he was going to sit down to dinner. When the lawyer, who was summoned immediately, had ransacked the cupboards and drawers, he discovered a mass of securities, of bank-

notes, and of gold, which Count d'Etchegorry, who was eaten up with avarice, had amassed eagerly and hidden away. It was found that Mademoiselle Mariettes-Anges, who was his sole heiress, possessed an income of fifty thousand francs.*

She received the news without any emotion, for of what use was such a fortune to her now, and what should she do with it? Her eyes, alas! had been too much opened by all the tears that had fallen from them for her to delude herself with visionary hopes, and her heart had been too cruelly wounded to warm itself by lying illusions. She was seized by melancholy when she thought that in future she would be coveted, she who had been kept at arm's length as if she had been a leper; that men would come after her money with odious impatience; that now that she was worn out and ugly, tired of everything and everybody, she would most certainly have plenty of suitors to refuse, and that perhaps he would come back to her, attracted by that amount of money, like a hawk hovering over its prey,—would try to rekindle the dead cinders, to revive some spark in them, and to obtain pardon for his cowardice.

Oh! With what bitter pleasure she could have thrown those thousands into the road to ragged beggars, or scattered them about like manna to all who were suffering and dying of hunger, and who had neither roof nor hearth! She naturally soon became the target at which everyone aimed, the goal for which all those who had formerly disdained her most now eagerly tried.

* \$10,000.

It was not long before Monsieur de Gèdre was in the ranks of her suitors, as she had foreseen, and caused her that last heart-burning of seeing him humbled, kneeling at her feet, acting a comedy, trying every means to overcome her resistance, and to regain possession of that heart, now closed against him, after having been entirely his, in all its adorable virginity.

And Marie-des-Anges had loved him so deeply that his letters, in which he recalled the past, and stirred up all the recollections of their love, their kisses, and their dreams, softened her in spite of herself, and came across her profound, incurable sadness, like a passing light, the reflection of a bonfire, which, from a distance, illumines a prison cell for a moment.

He was poor himself, and had not wished, so he said, to drag her into his life of privation and shifts. She thought to herself that perhaps he had been right; and thus insensibly, like an indulgent mother or elder sister, who wishes to close her eyes and her ears against everything, to forgive again and forgive always, she excused him. She tried to remember nothing but those months of tenderness and of ecstasy, those months of happiness, and that he had been the first, the only man who, in the course of her unhappy, wasted life, had given her a moment's peace, a day dream of bliss, and had made her happy, youthful, and loving.

He had been charitable toward her, and she would be so a hundredfold toward him. So she grew happy again, when she said to herself that she would be his benefactress, that even with his hard heart he could not, without some feelings of gratitude and emotion,

accept the sacrifice from a woman, who, like so many others, might have returned him evil for evil, but who preferred to be kind and maternal, after having been in love with him.

And that resolution transfigured her, restored to her, temporarily, something of her vanished youth. A poor, heroic saint among saints, she took refuge in a Carmelite convent, so as to escape from this returning temptation, and bequeathed everything of which she could lawfully dispose to Monsieur de Gèdre.

THE SPECTER



IN SPEAKING of a recent lawsuit, our conversation had turned on sequestration, and each of us, thereupon, had a story to tell—a story affirmed to be true. We were a party of intimate friends, who had passed a pleasant evening, now drawing to a close, in an old family residence in the Rue de Grenelle. The aged Marquis de la Tour-Samuel, bowed 'neath the weight of eighty-two winters, at last rose, and leaning on the mantelpiece, said, in somewhat trembling tones:

“I also know something strange, so strange that it has been a haunting memory all my life. It is now fifty-six years since the incident occurred, and yet not a month has passed in which I have not seen it again in a dream, so great was and is the impression of fear it left on my mind. For ten minutes I experienced such horrible fright that, ever since, a sort of constant terror has made me tremble at unexpected noises, and objects half-seen in the gloom of night

inspire me with a mad desire to take flight. In short, I am afraid of the dark!

"Ah, no! I would not have avowed that before having reached my present age! Now I can say anything. I have never receded before real danger. So at eighty-two years of age, I do not feel compelled to be brave over an imaginary danger.

"The affair upset me so completely, and caused me such lasting and mysterious uneasiness, that I never spoke of it to anyone. I will now tell it to you exactly as it happened, without any attempt at explanation.

"In July, 1827, I was in garrison at Rouen. One day, as I was walking on the quay, I met a man whom I thought I recognized, without being able to recall exactly who he was. Instinctively, I made a movement to stop; the stranger perceived it and at once extended his hand.

"He was a friend to whom I had been deeply attached as a youth. For five years I had not seen him, and he seemed to have aged half a century. His hair was quite white, and he walked with a stoop as though completely worn out. He apparently comprehended my surprise, for he told me of the misfortune which had shattered his life.

"Having fallen madly in love with a young girl he had married her, but, after a year of more than earthly happiness, she died suddenly of heart failure. He had left his château on the very day of her burial and had come to live at Rouen. There he still dwelt, more dead than alive, desperate and solitary, exhausted by grief, and so miserable that he thought constantly of suicide.

“‘Now that I have found you again,’ said he, ‘I will ask you to render me an important service. It is to go to my old home and get for me, from the desk of my bedroom—our bedroom—some papers which I greatly need. I cannot send a servant or an agent, as discretion and absolute silence are necessary. As for myself, nothing on earth would induce me to re-enter that house. I will give you the key of the room, which I myself locked on leaving, and the key of my desk—also a note to my gardener, telling him to open the château for you. But come and breakfast with me to-morrow, and we will arrange all that.’

“I promised to do him the slight favor he asked. For that matter, it was nothing of a trip, his property being but a few miles distant from Rouen and easily reached in an hour on horseback.

“At ten o’clock the following day I breakfasted, *tête-à-tête*, with my friend, but he scarcely spoke.

“He begged me to pardon him; the thought of the visit I was about to make to that room, the scene of his dead happiness, overwhelmed him, he said. He, indeed, seemed singularly agitated and preoccupied, as though undergoing some mysterious mental combat.

“At length he explained to me exactly what I had to do. It was very simple. I must take two packages of letters and a roll of papers from the first drawer on the right of the desk of which I had the key. He added, ‘I need not beg you to refrain from glancing at them.’

“I was wounded at that remark, and told him so somewhat sharply. He stammered, ‘Forgive me, I suffer so,’ and tears came to his eyes.

"At about one o'clock I took leave of him to accomplish my mission.

"The weather was glorious, and I cantered over the turf, listening to the songs of the larks and the rhythmical striking of my sword against my boot. Then I entered the forest and walked my horse. Branches of the trees caressed my face as I passed, and, now and then, I caught a leaf with my teeth, from sheer gladness of heart at being alive and strong on such a radiant day.

"As I approached the château, I took from my pocket the letter I had for the gardener, and was astonished at finding it sealed. I was so irritated that I was about to turn back without having fulfilled my promise, but reflected that I should thereby display undue susceptibility. My friend's state of mind might easily have caused him to close the envelope without noticing that he did so.

"The manor seemed to have been abandoned for twenty years. The open gate was dropping from its hinges; the walks were overgrown with grass, and the flower-beds were no longer distinguishable.

"The noise I made by tapping loudly on a shutter brought an old man from out a door near by, who seemed stunned with astonishment at seeing me. On receiving my letter, he read it, reread it, turned it over and over, looked me up and down, put the paper in his pocket, and finally asked:

"'Well! what is it you wish?'

"I replied shortly: 'You ought to know, since you have just read your master's orders. I wish to enter the château.'

"He seemed overcome. 'Then you are going in—in her room?'

"I began to lose patience and said sharply: 'Of course; but is that your affair?'

"He stammered in confusion: 'No—sir—but it is because—that is, it has not been opened since—since the—death. If you will be kind enough to wait five minutes, I will go to—to see if—'

"I interrupted him, angrily: 'Look here, what do you mean with your tricks? You know very well you cannot enter the room, since I have the key!'

"He no longer objected. 'Then, sir, I will show you the way.'

"'Show me the staircase and leave me. I'll find my way without you.'

"'But—sir—indeed—'

"This time I silenced him effectually, pushed him aside, and went into the house.

"I first traversed the kitchen; then two rooms occupied by the servant and his wife; next, by a wide hall, I reached the stairs, which I mounted, and recognized the door indicated by my friend.

"I easily opened it and entered. The apartment was so dark that, at first, I could distinguish nothing. I stopped short, my nostrils penetrated by the disagreeable, moldy odor of long-unoccupied rooms. Then, as my eyes slowly became accustomed to the darkness, I saw plainly enough, a large and disordered bedroom, the bed without sheets, but still retaining its mattresses and pillows, on one of which was a deep impression, as though an elbow or a head had recently rested there.

"The chairs all seemed out of place. I noticed that a door, doubtless that of a closet, had remained half open.

"I first went to the window, which I opened to let in the light; but the fastenings of the shutters had grown so rusty that I could not move them. I even tried to break them with my sword, but without success. As I was growing irritated over my useless efforts, and could now see fairly well in the semi-obscurity, I renounced the idea of getting more light and went over to the writing-table.

"Seating myself in an armchair and letting down the lid of the desk, I opened the designated drawer. It was full to the top. I needed but three packages, which I knew how to recognize, and began searching for them.

"I was straining my eyes in the effort to read the superscriptions, when I seemed to hear, or rather feel, something rustle back of me. I paid no attention, believing that a draught from the window was moving some drapery. But, in a minute or so, another movement, almost imperceptible, sent a strangely disagreeable little shiver over my skin. It was so stupid to be affected, even slightly, that self-respect prevented my turning around. I had then found the second packet I needed and was about to lay my hand on the third when a long and painful sigh, uttered just over my shoulder, made me bound like a madman from my seat and land several feet away. As I jumped I had turned about, my hand on the hilt of my sword, and, truly, had I not felt it at my side, I should have taken to my heels like a coward.

"A tall woman, dressed in white, stood gazing at

me from the back of the chair where I had been sitting an instant before.

"Such a shudder ran through all my limbs that I nearly fell backward. No one can understand unless he has felt it, that frightful, unreasoning terror! The mind becomes vague; the heart ceases to beat; the entire body grows as limp as a sponge.

"I do not believe in ghosts, nevertheless I completely gave way to a hideous fear of the dead; and I suffered more in those few moments than in all the rest of my life, from the irresistible anguish of supernatural fright. If she had not spoken, I should have died, perhaps! But she spoke, she spoke in a sweet, sad voice, that set my nerves vibrating. I dare not say that I became master of myself and recovered my reason. No! I was so frightened that I scarcely knew what I was doing; but a certain innate pride, a remnant of soldierly instinct, made me, almost in spite of myself, maintain a creditable countenance.

"She said: 'Oh! sir, you can render me a great service.'

"I wanted to reply, but it was impossible for me to pronounce a word. Only a vague sound came from my throat.

"She continued: 'Will you? You can save me, cure me. I suffer frightfully. I suffer, oh! how I suffer!' and she slowly seated herself in the armchair, still looking at me.

"'Will you?' she said.

"I replied 'Yes' by a nod, my voice still being paralyzed.

"Then she held out to me a tortoise-shell comb, and murmured:

“‘Comb my hair, oh! comb my hair; that will cure me; it must be combed. Look at my head—how I suffer; and my hair pulls so!’

“Her hair, unbound, very long and very black, it seemed to me, hung over the back of the chair and touched the floor.

“Why did I receive that comb with a shudder, and why did I take in my hands the long, black hair which gave to my skin a gruesomely cold sensation, as though I were handling snakes? I cannot tell.

“That sensation has remained in my fingers and I still tremble when I think of it.

“I combed her hair. I handled, I know not how, those icy locks. I twisted, knotted, and plaited, and braided them. She sighed and bowed her head, seeming to be happy. Suddenly she said: ‘Thank you!’ snatched the comb from my hands, and fled by the door that I had noticed ajar.

“Left alone, I experienced for several seconds the horrible agitation of one who awakens from a nightmare. At length I regained my full senses; I ran to the window, and with a mighty effort burst open the shutters, letting a flood of light into the room. Immediately I sprang to the door by which she had departed. I found it closed and immovable!

“Then a mad desire to flee came on me like a panic, the panic which soldiers know in battle. I seized the three packets of letters on the open secretary; ran from the room, dashed down the stairs, found myself outside, I know not how, and seeing my horse a few steps off, leaped into the saddle and galloped away.

“I stopped only when I reached Rouen and my

lodgings. There I shut myself into my room to reflect. For an hour I anxiously strove to convince myself that I had been the victim of an hallucination. I was about ready to believe that all I had seen was a vision, an error of my senses, when, as I approached the window, my eyes fell, by chance, upon my chest. Around the buttons of my uniform were entwined a quantity of long, black hairs! One by one, with trembling fingers, I plucked them off and threw them away.

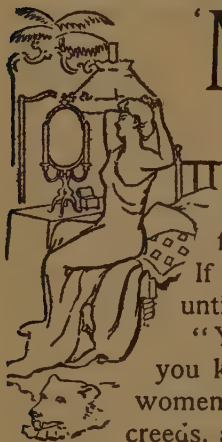
"I then called my orderly, feeling unable to see my friend that day; wishing, also, to reflect more fully upon what I ought to tell him. I had his letters carried to him, for which he gave the messenger a receipt. He asked after me most particularly, and, on being told I was ill—had had a sunstroke—appeared exceedingly anxious. Next morning I went to him, determined to tell him the truth. He had gone out the evening before and not yet returned. I called again during the day; my friend was still absent. After waiting a week longer without news of him, I advised the authorities, and a judicial search was instituted. Not the slightest trace of his whereabouts or manner of disappearance was discovered.

"A minute inspection of the abandoned château revealed nothing of a suspicious character. There was no indication that a woman had been concealed there.

"After these fruitless researches all further efforts were abandoned, and in the fifty-six years that have elapsed since then I have heard nothing more."

THE RELIC

"To the Abbé Louis d'Ennemare, at Soissons:



‘MY DEAR ABBÉ,—

“My marriage with your cousin is broken off in the stupidest manner, on account of a foolish trick which I involuntarily played my intended, in a fit of embarrassment, and I turn to you, my old school-fellow to help me out of the difficulty. If you can, I shall be grateful to you until I die.

“You know Gilberte, or rather you think you know her, for do we ever understand women? All their opinions, their ideas, their creeds, are a surprise to us. They are all full of twists and turns, of the unforeseen, of unintelligible arguments, of defective logic, and of obstinate ideas, which seem final, but which they alter because a little bird comes and perches on the window ledge.

“I need not tell you that your cousin is very religious, as she was brought up by the *White* (or was it the *Black*?) *Ladies* at Nancy. You know that

better than I do, but what you perhaps do not know is that she is just as excitable about other matters as she is about religion. She is as unstable as a leaf whirled away by the wind; and she is more of a girl than a woman, for she is moved or irritated in a moment, loves in a moment, hates in a moment, and changes in a moment. She is pretty, as you know, and more charming than I can say or you can guess.

"Well, we became engaged, and I adored her, as I adore her still, and she appeared to love me.

"One evening, I received a telegram summoning me to Cologne for a consultation, which might be followed by a serious and difficult operation. As I had to start the next morning, I went to wish Gilberte good-bye, and tell her that I should not dine with them on Wednesday, but on Friday, the day of my return. Ah! Take care of Fridays, for I assure you they are unlucky!

"When I told her that I had to go to Germany, I saw that her eyes filled with tears, but when I said I should be back very soon, she clapped her hands, and said:

"'I am very glad you are going, then! You must bring me back something; a mere trifle, just a souvenir, but a souvenir that you have chosen for me. You must find out what I should like best, do you hear? And then I shall see whether you have any imagination.'

"She thought for a few moments and then added:

"'I forbid you to spend more than twenty francs on it. I want it for the intention and for the remembrance of your penetration, and not for its intrinsic value.'

“And then, after another moment’s silence, she said, in a low voice, and with downcast eyes:

“‘If it costs you nothing in money, and if it is something very ingenious and pretty, I will—I will kiss you.’

“The next day, I was in Cologne. It was a case of a terrible accident, which had thrown a whole family into despair, and a difficult amputation was necessary. They put me up—I might almost say, they locked me up, and I saw nobody but people in tears, who almost deafened me with their lamentations. I operated on a man who appeared to be in a moribund state, and nearly died under my hands. I remained with him two nights, and then, when I saw that there was a chance of his recovery, I drove to the station. I had, however, made a mistake in the trains, and had an hour to wait, and so I wandered about the streets, still thinking of my poor patient, when a man accosted me. I do not know German, and he was totally ignorant of French, but at last I made out that he was offering me some reliques. I thought of Gilberte, for I knew her fanatical devotion, and here was my present ready to hand, so I followed the man into a shop where religious objects were for sale, and I bought *a small piece of a bone of one of the Eleven Thousand Virgins*.

“The pretended relic was inclosed in a charming old silver box, and that determined my choice. Putting my purchase into my pocket, I went to the railway station, and so to Paris.

“As soon as I got home, I wished to examine my purchase again, and on taking hold of it, I found

that the box was open, and the relic lost! It was no good to hunt in my pocket, and to turn it inside out; the small bit of bone, which was no bigger than half a pin, had disappeared.

"You know, my dear little Abbé, that my faith is not very great, but, as my friend, you are magnanimous enough to put up with my coldness, to leave me alone, and wait for the future, as you say. But I absolutely disbelieve in the relics of second-hand dealers in piety, and you share my doubts in that respect. Therefore, the loss of that bit of sheep's carcass did not grieve me, and I easily procured a similar fragment, which I carefully fastened inside my casket, and then I went to see my intended.

"As soon as she saw me, she ran up to me, smiling and anxious, and said to me:

"What have you brought me?"

"I pretended to have forgotten, but she did not believe me, and I made her beg me, and beseech me, even. But when I saw that she was devoured by curiosity, I gave her the sacred silver box. She appeared overjoyed.

"A relic! Oh! A relic!"

"And she kissed the box passionately, so that I was ashamed of my deception. She was not quite satisfied, however, and her uneasiness soon turned to terrible fear, and looking straight into my eyes, she said:

"Are you sure that it is authentic?"

"Absolutely certain."

"How can you be so certain?"

"I was caught, for to say that I had bought it through a man in the streets would be my destruc-

tion. What was I to say? A wild idea struck me, and I said, in a low, mysterious voice:

“‘I stole it for you.’

“She looked at me with astonishment and delight in her large eyes.

“‘Oh! You stole it? Where?’

“‘In the cathedral; in the very shrine of the Eleven Thousand Virgins.’

“Her heart beat with pleasure, and she murmured:

“‘Oh! Did you really do that for me? Tell me all about it!’

“There was an end of it, and I could not go back. I made up a fanciful story, with precise details. I had given the custodian of the building a hundred francs to be allowed to go about the building by myself; the shrine was being repaired, but I happened to be there at the breakfast time of the workmen and clergy; by removing a small panel, I had been enabled to seize a small piece of bone (oh! so small), among a quantity of others (I said a quantity, as I thought of the amount that the remains of the skeletons of eleven thousand virgins must produce). Then I went to a goldsmith's and bought a casket worthy of the relic; and I was not sorry to let her know that the silver box cost me five hundred francs.

“But she did not think of that; she listened to me, trembling, in an ecstasy, and whispering: ‘How I love you!’ she threw herself into my arms.

“Just note this: I had committed sacrilege for her sake; I had committed a theft; I had violated a shrine; violated and stolen holy relics, and for that she adored me, thought me loving, tender, divine. Such is woman, my dear Abbé, every woman.

"For two months I was the best of lovers. In her room she had made a kind of magnificent chapel in which to keep this bit of mutton chop, which, as she thought, had made me commit that love-crime, and she worked up her religious enthusiasm in front of it every morning and evening. I had asked her to keep the matter secret, for fear, as I said, that I might be arrested, condemned, and given over to Germany, and she kept her promise.

"Well, at the beginning of the summer she was seized by an irresistible wish to see the scene of my exploit, and she begged her father so persistently (without telling him her secret reason), that he took her to Cologne, but without telling me of their trip, according to his daughter's wish.

"I need not tell you that I had not seen the interior of the cathedral. I do not know where the tomb (if there be a tomb) of the Eleven Thousand Virgins is, and then, it appears that it is unapproachable, alas!

"A week afterward I received ten lines, breaking off our engagement, and then an explanatory letter from her father, whom she had, somewhat late, taken into her confidence.

"At the sight of the shrine, she had suddenly seen through my trickery and my lie, and had also found out that I was innocent of any other crime. Having asked the keeper of the relics whether any robbery had been committed, the man began to laugh, and pointed out to them how impossible such a crime was, but from the moment I had plunged my profane hand into venerable relics, I was no longer worthy of my fair-haired and delicate betrothed.

"I was forbidden the house; I begged and prayed in vain, nothing could move the fair devotee, and I grew ill from grief. Well, last week, her cousin, Madame d'Arville, who is also your relative, sent word that she should like to see me, and when I called, she told me on what conditions I might obtain my pardon, and here they are. I must bring Gilberte a relic, a real, authentic relic, certified to be such by Our Holy Father, the Pope, of some virgin and martyr, and I am going mad from embarrassment and anxiety.

"I will go to Rome, if needful, but I cannot call on the Pope unexpectedly and tell him my stupid adventure; and, besides, I doubt whether they let private individuals have relics. Could not you give me an introduction to some cardinal, or only to some French prelate, who possesses some remains of a female saint? Or perhaps you may have the precious object she wants in your collection?

"Help me out of my difficulty, my dear Abbé, and I promise you that I will be converted ten years sooner than I otherwise should be!

"Madame d'Arville, who takes the matter seriously, said to me the other day:

"'Poor Gilberte will never marry.'

"My dear old schoolfellow, will you allow your cousin to die the victim of a stupid piece of business on my part? Pray prevent her from being the eleventh thousand and one virgin.

"Pardon me, I am unworthy, but I embrace you, and love you with all my heart.

"Your old friend,

"HENRI FONTAL."

HAPPINESS



THE sky was blue, with light clouds that looked like swans slowly sailing on the waters of a lake, and the atmosphere was so warm, so saturated with the subtle odors of the mimosas, that Madame de Viellermont ordered coffee to be served on the terrace which overlooked the sea.

As the steam rose from the delicate china cups, one felt an almost inexpressible pleasure in watching the sails as they gradually disappeared in the mysterious distance.

The almost motionless sea had the sheen of jewels and attracted the eyes like the looks of a dreamy woman.

Monsieur de Pardeillac, who had just arrived from Paris, fresh from the remembrance of the last election there from that carnival of variegated posters which for weeks had imparted the strange aspect of an Oriental bazaar to the whole city, had just been relating the victory of "The General," and went on to say that those who had thought that the game was lost were beginning to hope again.

After listening to him, old Count de Lancolme, who had spent his whole life in rummaging libraries, and who had certainly annotated more manuscripts than any Benedictine friar, shook his bald head and exclaimed in his shrill, rather mocking voice:

"Will you allow me to tell you a very old story, which came into my head, while you were speaking, my dear friend? I read it formerly in an old Italian city, though I forget at this moment where.

"It happened in the fifteenth century, which is far removed from our epoch, but you shall judge for yourselves whether it might not have happened yesterday.

"Since the day, when, mad with rage and rebellion, the town had made a bonfire of the Ducal palace, and had ignominiously expelled the patrician who had been their *podestat** as if he had been some vicious scoundrel, had thrust his lovely daughter into a convent, and had forced his sons, who might have claimed their parental heritage and have again imposed the abhorred yoke upon them, into a monastery, the town had never known any prosperous times. One after another, the shops closed, and money became as scarce as if some invasion of barbarian hordes had emptied the State Treasury and stolen the last gold coin.

"The poor people were in abject misery, and in vain held out their hands to passers-by under the church porches and in the squares. Only the watchmen disturbed the silence of the starlit nights, by the monotonous and melancholy call which announced the flight of the hours as they passed.

* A Venetian or Genoese magistrate.

"There were no more serenades; no longer did viol and flute trouble the slumbers of the lover's choice; no longer were amorous arms thrown round women's supple waists, or bottles of red wine put to cool in the fountains under the trees. There were no more love adventures, to the rhythm of laughter and of kisses; nothing but heavy, monotonous weariness, and anxiety as to what the next day might bring forth, and ceaseless, unbridled ambitions and lusts.

"The palaces were deserted, one by one, as if the plague were raging, and the nobility had fled to Florence and to Rome. In the beginning, the common people, artisans and shopkeepers, had installed themselves in power, as in a conquered city, had seized posts of honor and well-paid offices, and had sacked the Treasury with their greedy and eager hands. After them came the middle classes, and these solemn upstarts and hypocrites, like leather bottles blown out with wind, acting like tyrants and lying without the least shame, disowned their former promises, and would soon have given the finishing stroke to the unfortunate city, which was already on its last legs.

"Discontent was increasing, and the *sbirri** could scarcely find time to tear the seditious placards, posted up by unknown hands, from the walls.

"But now that the old *podestat* had died in exile, worn out with grief, and his children, brought up under monastic rule, were accustomed to nothing but prayer, and thought only of their own salvation, there was nobody to take his place.

* Italian police officers.

“And so these kinglets profited by the occasion to strut about at their ease like nobles, to stuff themselves with luxurious meals, to increase their property by degrees, to put everything up for sale, and to get rid of those who, later on, would have called for accountings, and have nailed them to the pillory by their ears.

“Their arrogance knew no bounds, and when they were questioned about their acts, they only replied by menaces or raillery. This state of affairs lasted for twenty years, when, as war was imminent with Lucca, the Council raised troops and enrolled mercenaries. Several battles were fought, in which the enemy was beaten and was obliged to flee, abandoning their colors, their arms, prisoners, and all the booty in their camp.

“The man who had led the soldiers to victory, whom they had acclaimed as a triumphant and laurel-crowned Cæsar around their camp-fires, was a poor *condottiere*,* who possessed nothing in the world except his clothes, his buff jerkin, and his heavy sword.

“They called him ‘Hercules,’ on account of his strong muscles, his imposing build, and his large head, and also ‘Malavista,’ because in battle he had no pity, no weakness, but seemed, with his great murderous arms, as if he had the long reach of death itself. He had neither title-deeds, fortune, nor relatives, for he had been born one night in the tent of a female camp follower. For a long time, an old broken drum had been his cradle, and he had grown up without knowing those maternal kisses and en-

* An Italian mercenary or free-lance, in the Middle Ages.

dearments that warm the heart, or the pleasure of sleeping on a soft bed, or of eating decent beef. He had known what it was to tighten his sword belt when luck had turned—like a weather-cock when the wind shifts, and sometimes would gladly have given all his share of the next booty for a mouldy crust of bread and a glass of water.

“He was a simple and a brave man, whose heart was as virgin as some shore on which no human foot has ever yet left its imprint.

“The Chiefs of the Council were imprudent enough to summon Hercules Malavista within the walls of the town, and to celebrate his arrival with almost imperial splendor—more, however, to deceive the people and to regain their waning popularity by means of a ceremony copied from pagan Rome, than to honor and recompense the services of a soldier whom they despised at the bottom of their hearts.

“The bells rang a full peal, and the archbishop and clergy and choir boys went to meet the Captain, singing psalms and hymns of joy, as if it were Easter. The streets and squares were strewn with branches of box, roses, and marjoram, while the meanest homes were decorated with flags and hung with drapery and rich stuffs.

“The conqueror came in through Trajan’s gate, bare-headed, and with the symbolical golden laurel wreath on his head. Sitting on his horse, which was as black as a starless night, he appeared even taller, more vigorous and more masculine than he really was. He had a joyous and tranquil smile on his lips, and a hidden fire burning in his eyes. His soldiers bore the flags and the trophies that he had

gained, before him, and behind him there was a noise of clashing partisans and crossbows, and of loud voices shouting *vivats* in his honor.

"In this fashion, he traversed all the quarters of the town, and even the suburbs. The women thought him handsome and proud, blew kisses to him, and held up their children so that they might see him, and he might touch them. The men cheered him, and looked at him with emotion, and many of them reflected and dreamed about this bright, unknown man, who appeared to be surrounded by a halo of glory.

"The members of the Council began to perceive the extent of the almost irreparable fault they had committed. They did not know what to do in order to ward off the danger by which they were menaced, and to rid themselves of a guest who was quite ready to become their master. They saw clearly that their hours were numbered, that they were approaching the fatal period at which rioting becomes imminent, and leaders are carried away like pieces of straw in a swift current.

"Hercules could not show himself in public without being received with shouts of acclamation and noisy greetings, and deputations from the nobility, as well as from the people, came repeatedly and told him that he had only to make a sign and to say a word, for his name to be in every mouth, and for his authority to be accepted. They begged him on their knees to accept the supreme authority, as though he would be conferring a favor on them, but the free-lance did not seem to understand them, and repelled their offers with the superb indifference of a

soldier who has nothing to do with the people or a crown.

"At length, however, his resistance grew weaker; he felt the intoxication of power, and grew accustomed to the idea of holding the lives of thousands in his hands, of having a palace, arsenals full of arms, chests full of gold, ships which he could send on adventurous cruises wherever he pleased, of governing that city, with all its houses and all its churches, and of being a leading figure at all grand functions in the cathedral.

"The shopkeepers and merchants were overcome by terror at the idea, and bowed before the shadow of the sword, which might sweep them all away and upset their false weights and scales. So they assembled secretly in a monastery of the Carmelite friars outside the gates of the city, and a short time afterward the weaver Marconelli and the money-changer Rippone brought Giaconda, who was one of the most beautiful courtesans in Venice, who knew every secret in the Art of Love, and whose kisses were a foretaste of Paradise, back with them from that city. She soon managed to touch the soldier with her delicate, fair skin, to make him inhale its bewitching odor in close embrace, to dazzle him with her large, dark eyes, in which the reflection of stars seemed to shine, and when he had once tasted that feast of love, and drunk the heavy wine of kisses, when he had clasped that pink and white body in his arms, and had listened to a voice which sounded as soft as music and promised him eternities of joy and eternities of pleasures, Hercules lost his head, and forgot his dreams and his oaths.

“Why lose precious hours in conspiring, in deluding himself with chimeras; why risk his life when he loved and was loved—when the minutes were all too short to detach his lips from those of the woman he loved?

“And so he did whatever Giaconda demanded.

“They fled from the city, without even telling the sentinels who were on guard before his palace. They went far, far away, as they could not find any retreat that was sufficiently unknown and hidden. At last they stopped at a small, quiet fishing village, where there were gardens full of lemon-trees, where the deserted beach looked as if it were covered with gold, and where the sea was a deep blue until it was lost in the distance. And while the Captain and the courtesan loved each other and wore themselves out with pleasure—with the enchantment of the sea close to them—the irritated citizens whom he had left were clamoring for their idol, were indignant at his desertion, and tore up the paving stones in the streets to hurl at the man who had betrayed their confidence and worship.

“So they pulled his statue down from its pedestal, amid spiteful songs and jokes, and the members of the Council breathed again, no longer afraid of Malavista’s great sword.”

A DUEL



THE war was over. The Germans occupied France. The country was panting like a wrestler lying under the knee of his successful opponent.

The first trains from Paris, after the city's long agony of famine and despair, were making their way to the new frontiers, slowly passing through the country districts and the villages. The passengers gazed through the windows at the ravaged fields and burned hamlets. Prussian soldiers, in their black helmets with brass spikes, were smoking their pipes on horseback or sitting on chairs in front of the houses which were still left standing. Others were working or talking just as if they were members of the families. As you passed through the different towns, you saw entire regiments drilling in the squares, and, in spite of the rumble of the carriage-wheels, you could, every moment, hear the hoarse words of command.

M. Dubuis, who during the entire siege had served as one of the National Guard in Paris, was going to

join his wife and daughter, whom he had prudently sent away to Switzerland before the invasion.

Famine and hardship had not diminished the big paunch so characteristic of the rich, peace-loving merchant. He had gone through the terrible events of the past year with sorrowful resignation and bitter complaints at the savagery of men. Now that he was journeying to the frontier at the close of the war, he saw the Prussians for the first time, although he had done his duty at the ramparts, and staunchly mounted guard on cold nights.

He stared with mingled fear and anger at those bearded armed men installed all over French soil as if in their own homes, and he felt in his soul a kind of fever of impotent patriotism even while he yielded to that other instinct of discretion and self-preservation which never leaves us. In the same compartment, two Englishmen, who had come to the country as sight-seers, were gazing around with looks of stolid curiosity. They were both stout also, and kept chatting in their own language, sometimes referring to their guidebook, and reading in loud tones the names of the places indicated.

Suddenly, the train stopped at a little village station, and a Prussian officer jumped up with a great clatter of his saber on the double footboard of the railway-carriage. He was tall, wore a tight-fitting uniform, and his face had a very shaggy aspect. His red hair seemed to be on fire and his long mustache and beard, of a paler color, was stuck out on both sides of his face, which it seemed to cut in two.

The Englishmen at once began staring at him with smiles of newly-awakened interest, while M.

Dubuis made a show of reading a newspaper. He sat crouched in a corner, like a thief in the presence of a gendarme.

The train started again. The Englishmen went on chatting, and looking out for the exact scene of different battles; and, all of a sudden, as one of them stretched out his arm toward the horizon to indicate a village, the Prussian officer remarked in French, extending his long legs and lolling backward:

"We killed a dozen Frenchmen in that village, and took more than a hundred prisoners."

The Englishmen, quite interested, immediately asked:

"Ha! and what is the name of this village?"

The Prussian replied:

"Pharsbourg."

He added: "We caught these French blackguards by the ears."

And he glanced toward M. Dubuis, laughing into his mustache in an insulting fashion.

The train rolled on, always passing through hamlets occupied by the victorious army. German soldiers could be seen along the roads, on the edges of fields, standing in front of gates, or chatting outside *cafés*. They covered the soil like African locusts.

The officer said, with a wave of his hand:

"If I were in command, I'd take Paris, burn everything, and kill everybody. No more France!"

The Englishmen, through politeness, replied simply:

"Ah! yes."

He went on:

"In twenty years, all Europe, all of it, will belong to us. Prussia is more than a match for all of them."

The Englishmen, getting uneasy, said nothing in answer to this. Their faces, which had become impassive, seemed made of wax behind their long whiskers. Then the Prussian officer began to laugh. And then, lolling back, he began to sneer. He sneered at the downfall of France, insulted the prostrate enemy; he sneered at Austria which had been recently conquered; he sneered at the furious but fruitless defense of the departments; he sneered at the Garde Mobile and at the useless artillery. He announced that Bismarck was going to build a city of iron with the captured cannons. And suddenly he pushed his boots against the thigh of M. Dubuis, who turned his eyes away, reddening to the roots of his hair.

The Englishmen seemed to have assumed an air of complete indifference, as if they had found themselves all at once shut up in their own island, far from the din of the world.

The officer took out his pipe, and, looking fixedly at the Frenchman, said:

"You haven't got any tobacco—have you?"

M. Dubuis replied:

"No, Monsieur."

The German said:

"You might go and buy some for me when the train stops next."

And he began laughing afresh, as he added:

"I'll let you have the price of a drink."

The train whistled and slackened its pace. They had reached a station which had been burned down and here there was a regular stop.

The German opened the carriage door, and, catching M. Dubuis by the arm, said:

“Go, and do what I told you—quick, quick!”

A Prussian detachment occupied the station. Other soldiers were looking on from behind wooden gratings. The engine was already getting up steam in order to start off again. Then M. Dubuis hurriedly jumped on the platform, and, in spite of the warnings of the station-master, dashed into the adjoining compartment.

* * * * *

He was alone! He tore open his waistcoat, so rapidly did his heart beat, and, panting for breath, he wiped the perspiration off his forehead.

The train drew up at another station. And suddenly the officer appeared at the carriage door, and jumped in, followed close behind by the two Englishmen, who were impelled by curiosity. The German sat facing the Frenchman, and, laughing still, said:

“You did not want to do what I asked you.”

M. Dubuis replied: “No, Monsieur.”

The train had just left the station, when the officer said:

“I’ll cut off your mustache to fill my pipe with.” And he put out his hand toward the Frenchman’s face.

The Englishmen kept staring in the same impassive fashion with fixed glances. Already the German had caught hold of the mustache and was tugging at it, when M. Dubuis, with a back-stroke of his hand threw back the officer’s arm, and, seizing him by the collar, flung him down on the seat. Then, excited to a pitch of fury, with his temples swollen and his eyes glaring, he kept throttling the officer with one

hand while with the other clenched, he began to strike him violent blows in the face. The Prussian struggled, tried to draw his saber, and to get a grip, while lying back, of his adversary. But M. Dubuis crushed him with the enormous weight of his stomach, and kept hitting him without taking breath or knowing where his blows fell. Blood flowed down the face of the German, who, choking and with a rattling in his throat, spat forth his broken teeth, and vainly strove to shake off this infuriated man who was killing him.

The Englishmen had got on their feet and came closer in order to see better. They remained standing, full of mirth and curiosity, ready to bet for or against each of the combatants.

And suddenly M. Dubuis, exhausted by his violent efforts, went and resumed his seat without uttering a word.

The Prussian did not attack him, for the savage assault had scared and terrified the officer. When he was able to breathe freely, he said:

"Unless you give me satisfaction with pistols, I will kill you."

M. Dubuis replied:

"Whenever you like. I'm quite ready."

The German said:

"Here is the town of Strasbourg. I'll get two officers to be my seconds, and there will be time before the train leaves the station."

M. Dubuis, who was puffing as much as the engine, said to the Englishmen:

"Will you be my seconds?" They both answered together:

"Oh! yes."

And the train stopped.

In a minute, the Prussian had found two comrades who carried pistols, and they made their way toward the ramparts.

The Englishmen were continually looking at their watches, shuffling their feet, and hurrying on with the preparations, uneasy lest they should be too late for the train.

M. Dubuis had never fired a pistol in his life. They made him stand twenty paces away from his enemy. He was asked:

"Are you ready?"

While he was answering "Yes, Monsieur," he noticed that one of the Englishmen had opened his umbrella in order to keep off the rays of the sun.

A voice gave the word of command.

"Fire!"

M. Dubuis fired at random without minding what he was doing, and he was amazed to see the Prussian staggering in front of him, lifting up his arms, and immediately afterward, falling straight on his face. He had killed the officer.

One of the Englishmen ejaculated "Ah!" quivering with delight, satisfied curiosity, and joyous impatience. The other who still kept his watch in his hand, seized M. Dubuis's arm, and hurried him in double-quick time toward the station, his fellow-countryman counting their steps, with his arms pressed close to his sides: "One! two! one! two!"

And all three marching abreast they rapidly made their way to the station like three grotesque figures in a comic newspaper.

The train was on the point of starting. They sprang into their carriage. Then the Englishmen, taking off their traveling-caps, waved them three times over their heads, exclaiming:

“Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!”

Then gravely, one after the other, they stretched out their right hands to M. Dubuis, and then went back and sat in their own corner.

THE LOVE OF LONG AGO



THE old-fashioned château was built on a wooded height. Tall trees surrounded it with dark greenery; and the vast park extended its vistas here over a deep forest and there over an open plain. Some little distance from the front of the mansion stood a huge stone basin in which marble nymphs were bathing. Other basins arranged in order succeeded each other down as far as the foot of the slope, and a hidden fountain sent cascades dancing from one to the other.

From the manor-house, which preserved the grace of a superannuated coquette, down to the grottos incrustated with shellwork, where slumbered the loves of a bygone age, everything in this antique demesne had retained the physiognomy of former days. Everything seemed to speak still of ancient customs, of the manners of long ago, of faded gallantries, and of the elegant trivialities so dear to our grandmothers.

In a parlor in the style of Louis XV., the walls of which were covered with shepherds courting

shepherdesses, beautiful ladies in hoop petticoats, and gallant gentlemen in wigs, a very old woman, who seemed dead as soon as she ceased to move, was almost lying down in a large easy-chair while her thin, mummy-like hands hung down, one at each side of her.

Her eyes were gazing languidly toward the distant horizon as if they sought to follow through the park visions of her youth. Through the open window every now and then came a breath of air laden with the scent of grass and the perfume of flowers. It made her white locks flutter around her wrinkled forehead and old memories sweep through her brain.

Beside her on a tapestried stool, a young girl, with long, fair hair hanging in plaits over her neck, was embroidering an altar-cloth. There was a pensive expression in her eyes, and it was easy to see that, while her agile fingers worked, her brain was busy with thoughts.

But the old lady suddenly turned round her head.

"Berthe," she said, "read something out of the newspapers for me, so that I may still know sometimes what is happening in the world."

The young girl took up a newspaper, and cast a rapid glance over it.

"There is a great deal about politics, grand-mamma; am I to pass it by?"

"Yes, yes, darling. Are there no accounts of love affairs? Is gallantry, then, dead in France that they no longer talk about abductions or adventures as they did formerly?"

The girl made a long search through the columns of the newspaper.

"Here is one," she said. "It is entitled, 'A Love-Drama.'"

The old woman smiled through her wrinkles. "Read that for me," she said.

And Berthe commenced. It was a case of vitriol-throwing. A wife, in order to avenge herself on her husband's mistress, had burned her face and eyes. She had left the Assize-Court acquitted, declared to be innocent, amid the applause of the crowd.

The grandmother moved about excitedly in her chair, and exclaimed:

"This is horrible—why, it is perfectly horrible! See whether you can find anything else to read for me, darling."

Berthe again made a search; and further down in the reports of criminal cases at which her attention was still directed. She read:

"'Gloomy Drama.—A shopgirl, no longer young, allowed herself to yield to the embraces of a young man. Then, to avenge herself on her lover, whose heart proved fickle, she shot him with a revolver. The unhappy man is maimed for life. The jury consisted of men of moral character, and took the part of the murderess—regarding her as the victim of illicit love. They honorably acquitted her.'"

This time, the old grandmother appeared quite shocked, and, in a trembling voice, said:

"Why, you are mad, then, nowadays. You are mad! The good God has given you love, the only allurements in life. Man has added to this gallantry, the only distraction of our dull hours, and here are you mixing up with it vitriol and revolvers, as if one were to put mud into a flagon of Spanish wine."

Berthe did not seem to understand her grandmother's indignation.

"But, grandmamma, this woman avenged herself. Remember, she was married, and her husband deceived her."

The grandmother gave a start.

"What ideas have they been putting into the heads of you young girls of to-day?"

Berthe replied:

"But marriage is sacred, grandmamma."

The grandmother's heart, which had its birth in the great age of gallantry, gave a sudden leap.

"It is love that is sacred," she said. "Listen, child, to an old woman who has seen three generations and who has had a long, long experience of men and women. Marriage and love have nothing in common. We marry to found a family, and we form families in order to constitute society. Society cannot dispense with marriage. If society is a chain, each family is a link in that chain. In order to weld those links, we always seek for metals of the same kind. When we marry, we must bring together suitable conditions; we must combine fortunes, unite similar races, and aim at the common interests, which are riches and children. We marry only once, my child, because the world requires us to do so, but we may love twenty times in one lifetime because nature has made us able to do this. Marriage, you see, is law, and love is an instinct, which impels us sometimes along a straight and sometimes along a crooked path. The world has made laws to combat our instincts—it was necessary to make them; but our instincts are always stronger, and we ought not to resist them too much, because they come from God, while the laws only come from men. If we did not perfume life

with love, as much love as possible, darling, as we put sugar into drugs for children, nobody would care to take it just as it is."

Berthe opened her eyes widely in astonishment. She murmured:

"Oh! grandmamma, we can only love once."

The grandmother raised her trembling hands toward Heaven, as if again to invoke the defunct god of gallantries. She exclaimed indignantly:

"You have become a race of serfs, a race of common people. Since the Revolution, it is impossible any longer to recognize society. You have attached big words to every action, and wearisome duties to every corner of existence; you believe in equality and eternal passion. People have written verses telling you that people have died of love. In my time, verses were written to teach men to love every woman. And we!—when we liked a gentleman, my child, we sent him a page. And when a fresh caprice came into our hearts, we were not slow in getting rid of the last lover—unless we kept both of them."

The old woman smiled with a keen smile, and a gleam of roguery twinkled in her gray eye, the sprightly, sceptical roguery of those people who did not believe that they were made of the same clay as the others, and who lived as rulers for whom common restrictions were not made.

The young girl, turning very pale, faltered out:

"So, then, women have no honor."

The grandmother ceased to smile. If she had kept in her soul some of Voltaire's irony, she had also a little of Rousseau's glowing philosophy: "No honor! because we loved, and dared to say so, and even

boasted of it? But, my child, if one of us, among the greatest ladies in France, were to live without a lover, she would have the entire court laughing at her. Those who wished to live differently had only to enter a convent. And you imagine perhaps that your husbands will love you alone all their lives. As if, indeed, this could be the case. I tell you that marriage is a thing necessary in order that society should exist, but it is not in the nature of our race, do you understand? There is only one good thing in life, and that is love. And how you misunderstand it! how you spoil it! You treat it as something solemn, like a sacrament, or something to be bought, like a dress."

The young girl caught the old woman's trembling hands in her own.

"Hold your tongue, I beg of you, grandmamma!"

And, on her knees, with tears in her eyes, she prayed to Heaven to bestow on her a great passion, one eternal passion alone, in accordance with the dream of modern poets, while the grandmother, kissing her on the forehead, still penetrated by that charming, healthy logic by which the philosophers of gallantry sprinkled salt upon the life of the eighteenth century, murmured:

"Take care, my poor darling! If you believe in such follies as this, you will be very unhappy."

THE FARMER'S WIFE



ONE day Baron René du Treilles said to me:

"Will you come and open the hunting season with me in my farmhouse at Marinville? By doing so, my dear fellow, you will give me the greatest pleasure. Besides, I am all alone. This will be a hard hunting-bout, to start with, and the house where I sleep is so primitive that I can only bring my most intimate friends there."

I accepted his invitation. So on Saturday we started by the railway-line running into Normandy, and alighted at the station of Alvimare. Baron René, pointing out to me a country jaunting-car drawn by a restive horse, driven by a big peasant with white hair, said to me:

"Here is our equipage, my dear boy."

The man extended his hand to his landlord, and the Baron pressed it warmly, asking:

"Well, Maître Lebrument, how are you?"

"Always the same, M'sieu l' Baron."

We jumped into this hencoop suspended and shaken on two immense wheels. The young horse, after a violent swerve, started into a gallop, flinging us into the air like balls. Every fall backward on to the wooden bench gave me the most dreadful pain.

The peasant kept repeating in his calm, monotonous voice:

"There, there! it's all right, all right, Moutard, all right!"

But Moutard scarcely heard and kept scampering along like a goat.

Our two dogs, behind us, in the empty part of the hencoop, stood erect and sniffed the air of the plains as if they could smell the game.

The Baron gazed into the distance, with a sad eye. The vast Norman landscape, undulating and melancholy as an immense English park, with farmyards surrounded by two or four rows of trees and full of dwarfed apple-trees which rendered the houses invisible, gave a vista, as far as the eye could see, of old forest-trees, tufts of wood and hedgerows, which artistic gardeners provide for when they are tracing the lines of princely estates.

And René de Treilles suddenly exclaimed:

"I love this soil; I have my very roots in it."

A pure Norman, tall and strong, with the more or less projecting paunch of the old race of adventurers who went to found kingdoms on the shores of every ocean, he was about fifty years of age, ten years less perhaps than the farmer who was driving us. The latter was a lean peasant, all skin and bone, one of those men who live a hundred years.

After two hours' traveling over stony roads, across that green and monotonous plain, the vehicle entered one of those fruit-gardens which adorn the fronts of farmhouses, and drew up before an old structure falling into decay, where an old maid-servant stood waiting at the side of a young fellow who seized the horse's bridle.

We entered the farmhouse. The smoky kitchen was high and spacious. The copper utensils and the earthenware glistened under the reflection of the big fire. A cat lay asleep under the table. Within, you inhaled the odor of milk, of apples, of smoke, that indescribable smell peculiar to old houses where peasants have lived—the odor of the soil, of the walls, of furniture, of stale soup, of washing, and of the old inhabitants, the smell of animals and human beings intermingled, of things and of persons, the odor of time and of things that have passed away.

I went out to have a look at the farmyard. It was big, full of old apple-trees dwarfed and crooked, and laden with fruit which fell on the grass around them. In this farmyard the smell of apples was as strong as that of the orange-trees which blossom on the banks of southern rivers.

Four rows of beeches surrounded this inclosure. They were so tall that they seemed to touch the clouds, at this hour of nightfall, and their summits, through which the night winds passed, shook and sang a sad, interminable song.

I re-entered the house. The Baron was warming his feet at the fire, and was listening to the farmer's talk about country matters. He talked about marriages, births, and deaths, then about the fall in the

price of corn and the latest news about the selling value of cattle. The "Veularde" (as he called a cow that had been bought at the fair of Veules) had calved in the middle of June. The cider had not been first-class last year. The apricot-apples were almost disappearing from the country.

Then we had dinner. It was a good rustic meal, simple and abundant, long and tranquil. And while we were dining, I noticed the special kind of friendly familiarity between the Baron and the peasant which had struck me from the start.

Without, the beeches continued sobbing in the nightwind, and our two dogs, shut up in a shed, were whining and howling in uncanny fashion. The fire was dying out in the big grate. The maid-servant had gone to bed. Maître Lebrument said in his turn:

"If you don't mind, M'sieu l' Baron, I'm going to bed. I am not used to staying up late."

The Baron extended his hand toward him and said: "Go, my friend," in so cordial a tone that I said, as soon as the man had disappeared:

"He is devoted to you, this farmer?"

"Better than that, my dear fellow! It is a drama, an old drama, simple and very sad, that attaches him to me. Here is the story:

"You know that my father was a colonel in a cavalry regiment. His orderly was this young fellow, now an old man, the son of a farmer. Then, when my father retired from the army, he took this retired soldier, then about forty, as his servant. I was at that time about thirty. We lived then in our old château of Valrenne, near Caudebec-in-Caux.

"At this period, my mother's chambermaid was one of the prettiest girls you could see, fair-haired, slender, and sprightly in manner, a genuine specimen of the fascinating Abigail, such as we scarcely ever find nowadays. To-day these creatures spring up into hussies before their time. Paris, with the aid of the railways, attracts them, calls them, takes hold of them, as soon as they are bursting into womanhood—these little wenches who, in old times, remained simple maid-servants. Every man passing by, as long ago recruiting sergeants did with conscripts, entices and debauches them—foolish lassies—till now we have only the scum of the female sex for servant-maids, all that is dull, nasty, common, and ill-formed, too ugly even for gallantry.

"Well, this girl was charming, and I often gave her a kiss in dark corners—nothing more, I swear to you! She was virtuous, besides; and I had some respect for my mother's house, which is more than can be said of the blackguards of the present day.

"Now it happened that my father's man-servant, the ex-soldier, the old farmer you have just seen, fell in love with this girl, but in an unusual sort of way. The first thing we noticed was that his memory was affected; he did not pay attention to anything.

"My father was incessantly saying: 'Look here, Jean! What's the matter with you? Are you unwell?'

"'No, no, M'sieu l' Baron. There's nothing the matter with me.'

"Jean got thin. Then, when serving at table, he broke glasses and let plates fall. We thought he must have been attacked by some nervous malady,

and we sent for the doctor, who thought he could detect symptoms of spinal disease. Then my father, full of anxiety about his faithful man-servant, decided to place him in a private hospital. When the poor fellow heard of my father's intentions, he made a clean breast of it.

“‘M'sieu l' Baron—’

“‘Well, my boy?’

“‘You see, the thing I want is not physic.’

“‘Ha! what is it, then?’

“‘It's marriage!’

“My father turned round and stared at him in astonishment.

“‘What's that you say—eh?’

“‘It's marriage.’

“‘Marriage? So then, you donkey, you're in love.’

“‘That's how it is, M'sieu l' Baron.’

“And my father began to laugh in such an immoderate fashion that my mother called out through the wall of the next room:

“‘What in the name of goodness is the matter with you, Gontran?’

“My father replied:

“‘Come here, Catherine.’

“And, when she came in, he told, with tears in his eyes from sheer laughter, that his idiot of a servant-man was love-sick.

“But my mother, instead of laughing, was deeply affected.

“‘Who is it that you have fallen in love with, my poor fellow?’ she asked.

“He answered, without hesitation:

“‘With Louise, Madame la Baronne.’

"My mother said, with the utmost gravity: 'We must try to arrange the matter the best way we can.'

"So Louise was sent for, and questioned by my mother. She said in reply that she knew all about Jean's liking for her, that in fact Jean had spoken to her about it several times, but that she did not want him. She refused to say why.

"And two months elapsed during which my father and mother never ceased to urge this girl to marry Jean. As she declared she was not in love with any other man, she could not give any serious reason for her refusal. My father, at last, overcame her resistance by means of a big present of money, and started the pair of them on a farm on the estate—this very farm. At the end of three years, I learned that Louise had died of consumption. But my father and my mother died, too, in their turn, and it was two years more before I found myself face to face with Jean.

"At last, one autumn day, about the end of October, the idea came into my head to go hunting on this part of my estate, which my tenant had told me was full of game.

"So, one evening, one wet evening, I arrived at this house. I was shocked to find the old soldier who had been my father's servant perfectly white-haired, though he was not more than forty-five or forty-six years of age. I made him dine with me, at the very table where we're now sitting. It was raining hard. We could hear the rain battering at the roof, the walls, and the windows, flowing in a perfect deluge into the farmyard; and my dog was howling in the shed where the other dogs are howling to-night.

"All of a sudden, when the servant-maid had gone to bed, the man said in a timid voice:

"'M'sieu l' Baron.'

"'What is it, my dear Jean?'

"'I have something to tell you.'

"'Tell it, my dear Jean.'

"'You remember Louise, my wife?'

"'Certainly, I do remember her.'

"'Well, she left me a message for you.'

"'What was it?'

"'A—a—well, it was what you might call a confession.'

"'Ha! And what was it about?'

"'It was—it was—I'd rather, all the same, tell you nothing about it—but I must—I must. Well, it's this—it wasn't consumption she died of at all. It was grief—well, that's the long and the short of it. As soon as she came to live here, after we were married, she grew thin; she changed so that you wouldn't know her at the end of six months—no, you wouldn't know her, M'sieu l' Baron. It was all just as before I married her, but it was different, too, quite another sort of thing.

"'I sent for the doctor. He said it was her liver that was affected—he said it was what he called a "hepatic" complaint—I don't know these big words M'sieu l' Baron. Then I bought medicine for her, heaps on heaps of bottles, that cost about three hundred francs. But she'd take none of them; she wouldn't have them; she said: "It's no use, my poor Jean; it wouldn't do me any good." I saw well that she had some hidden trouble; and then I found her one time crying, and I didn't know what to do

—no, I didn't know what to do. I bought caps and dresses and hair-oil and earrings for her. No good! And I saw that she was going to die. And so one night in the end of November, one snowy night, after remaining the whole day without stirring out of the bed, she told me to send for the curé. So I went for him. As soon as he had come, she saw him. Then, she asked him to let me come into the room, and she said to me: "Jean, I'm going to make a confession to you. I owe it to you, Jean. I have never been false to you, never!—never, before or after you married me. M'sieu le Curé is there, and can tell it is so, and he knows my soul. Well, listen, Jean. If I am dying, it is because I was not able to console myself for leaving the château—because—I was too—too fond of the young Baron, Monsieur René—too fond of him, mind you, Jean,—there was no harm in it! This is the thing that's killing me. When I could see him no more, I felt that I should die. If I could only have seen him, I might have lived; only seen him, nothing more. I wish you'd tell it to him some day, by-and-by, when I am no longer there. You will tell him—swear you will, Jean—swear it in the presence of M'sieu le Curé! It will console me to know that he will know it one day—that this was the cause of my death! Swear it!"

"Well, I gave her my promise, M'sieu l' Baron! and, on the faith of an honest man, I have kept my word."

"And then he ceased speaking, his eyes filling with tears."

* * * * *

"Upon my soul, my dear boy, you can't form any idea of the emotion that filled me when I heard this

poor devil, whose wife I had caused the death of without knowing it, telling me this story on that wet night in this very kitchen.

"I exclaimed: 'Ah! my poor Jean! my poor Jean!'

"He murmured: 'Well, that's all, M'sieu l' Baron. I could do nothing, one way or another—and now it's all over!'

"I caught his hand across the table, and I began to cry.

"He asked: 'Will you come and see her grave?' I nodded by way of assent, for I couldn't speak. He rose up, lighted a lantern, and we walked through the blinding rain which, in the light of the lamp, looked like falling arrows.

"He opened a gate, and I saw some crosses of blackwood.

"Suddenly, he said: 'There it is, in front of a marble slab,' and he flashed the lantern close to it so that I could read the inscription:


" 'TO LOUISE-HORTENSE MARINET,
WIFE of *Jean-François Lebrument, farmer.*
She was a faithful Wife! God rest her Soul!'

"We fell on our knees in the damp grass, he and I, with the lantern between us, and I saw the rain beating on the white marble slab. And I thought of the heart of her sleeping there in her grave. Ah! poor heart! poor heart!

* * * * *

"Since then, I have been coming here every year. And I don't know why, but I feel as if I were guilty of some crime in the presence of this man who always shows that he forgives me!"

BESIDE A DEAD MAN



HE WAS slowly dying, as consumptives die. I saw him sitting down every day at two o'clock under the windows of the hotel, facing the tranquil sea on an open-air bench. He remained for some time without moving, in the heat of the sun, gazing mournfully at the Mediterranean. Every now and then he cast a glance at the lofty mountain with vaporous summits which shuts in Mentone; then, with a very slow movement, he crossed his long legs, so thin that they seemed two bones, around which fluttered the cloth of his trousers, and opened a book, which was always the same. And then he did not stir any more, but read on, read on with his eye and with his mind; all his poor expiring body seemed to read, all his soul plunged, lost itself, disappeared, in this book, up to the hour when the cool air made him cough a little. Then he got up and re-entered the hotel.

He was a tall German, with a fair beard, who breakfasted and dined in his own room, and spoke to nobody.

A vague curiosity attracted me to him. One day, I sat down by his side, having taken up a book, too, to keep up appearances, a volume of Musset's poems.

And I began to run through "Rolla."

Suddenly, my neighbor said to me, in good French:

"Do you know German, Monsieur?"

"Not at all, Monsieur."

"I am sorry for that. Since chance has thrown us side by side, I could have lent you, I could have shown you, an inestimable thing—this book which I hold in my hand."

"What is it, pray?"

"It is a copy of my master, Schopenhauer, annotated with his own hand. All the margins, as you may see, are covered with his handwriting."

I took the book from him reverently, and I gazed at those forms incomprehensible to me, but which revealed the immortal thoughts of the greatest shatterer of dreams who had ever dwelt on earth.

And Musset's verses arose in my memory:

"Hast thou found out, Voltaire, that it is bliss to die,
Or does thy hideous smile over thy bleached bones fly?"

And involuntarily I compared the childish sarcasm, the religious sarcasm, of Voltaire with the irresistible irony of the German philosopher whose influence is henceforth ineffaceable.

Let us protest and let us be angry, let us be indignant or let us be enthusiastic. Schopenhauer has marked humanity with the seal of his disdain and of his disenchantment. A disabused pleasure-seeker, he overthrew beliefs, hopes, poetic ideals, and chimeras, destroyed the aspirations, ravaged the confidence of

souls, killed love, dragged down the chivalrous worship of woman, crushed the illusions of hearts, and accomplished the most gigantic task ever attempted by scepticism. He passed over everything with his mocking spirit, and left everything empty. And even to-day those who execrate him seem to carry portions of his thought, in spite of themselves, in their own souls.

"So, then, you were intimately acquainted with Schopenhauer?" I said to the German.

He smiled sadly.

"Up to the time of his death, Monsieur."

And he spoke to me about the philosopher, and told me about the almost supernatural impression which this strange being made on all who came near him.

He gave me an account of the interview of the old iconoclast with a French politician, a *doctrinaire* Republican, who wanted to get a glimpse of this man, and found him in a noisy tavern, seated in the midst of his disciples, dry, wrinkled, laughing with an unforgettable laugh, eating and tearing ideas and beliefs with a single word, as a dog tears with one bite of his teeth the tissues with which he plays.

He repeated for me the comment of this Frenchman as he went away, scared and terrified: "I thought that I had spent an hour with the devil."

Then he added:

"He had, indeed, Monsieur, a frightful smile, which terrified us even after his death. I can tell you an anecdote about it not generally known, if it has any interest for you."

And he began, in a tired voice, interrupted by frequent fits of coughing:

"Schopenhauer had just died, and it was arranged that we should watch, in turn, two by two, till morning.

"He was lying in a large apartment, very simple, vast, and gloomy. Two wax-candles were burning on the bedside stand.

"It was midnight when I took up my task of watching along with one of our comrades. The two friends whom we replaced had left the apartment, and we came and sat down at the foot of the bed.

"The face was not changed. It was laughing. That pucker which we knew so well lingered still around the corners of the lips, and it seemed to us that he was about to open his eyes, to move, and to speak. His thought, or rather his thoughts, enveloped us. We felt ourselves more than ever in the atmosphere of his genius, absorbed, possessed by him. His domination seemed to us even more sovereign now that he was dead. A sense of mystery was blended with the power of this incomparable spirit.

"The bodies of these men disappear, but they remain themselves; and in the night which follows the stoppage of their heart's beating, I assure you, Monsieur, they are terrifying.

"And in hushed tones we talked about him, recalling to mind certain sayings, certain formulas of his, those startling maxims which are like jets of flame flung, by means of some words, into the darkness of the Unknown Life.

"'It seems to me that he is going to speak,' said my comrade. And we stared with uneasiness bordering on fear at the motionless face with its eternal

laugh. Gradually, we began to feel ill at ease, oppressed, on the point of fainting. I faltered:

“‘I don’t know what is the matter with me, but, I assure you I am not well.’

“And at that moment we noticed that there was an unpleasant odor from the corpse.

“Then, my comrade suggested that we should go into the adjoining room, and leave the door open; and I assented to this proposal.

“I took one of the wax-candles which burned on the bedside stand, and I left the second behind. Then we went and sat down at the other end of the adjoining apartment, so as to be able to see from where we were the bed and the corpse clearly revealed by the light.

“But he still held possession of us. One would have said that his immaterial essence, liberated, free, all-powerful, and dominating, was flitting around us. And sometimes, too, the dreadful smell of the decomposing body came toward us and penetrated us, sickening and indefinable.

“Suddenly a shiver passed through our bones: a sound, a slight sound, came from the death-chamber. Immediately we fixed our glances on him, and we saw, yes, Monsieur, we saw distinctly, both of us, something white flying over the bed, falling on the carpet, and vanishing under an armchair.

“We were on our feet before we had time to think of anything, distracted by stupefying terror, ready to run away. Then we stared at each other. We were horribly pale. Our hearts throbbed so fiercely that our clothes swelled over our chests. I was the first to speak.

“‘You saw?’

“‘Yes, I saw.’

“‘Can it be that he is not dead?’

“‘Why not, when the body is putrefying?’

“‘What are we to do?’

“My companion said in a hesitating tone:

“‘We must go and look.’

“I took our wax-candle and I entered first, searching with my eye through all the large apartment with its dark corners. There was not the least movement now, and I approached the bed. But I stood transfixed with stupor and fright: Schopenhauer was no longer laughing! He was grinning in a horrible fashion, with his lips pressed together and deep hollows in his cheeks. I stammered out:

“‘He is not dead!’

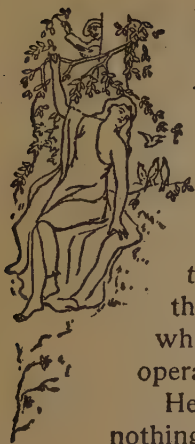
“But the terrible odor rose up to my nose and stifled me. And I no longer moved, but kept staring fixedly at him, scared as if in the presence of an apparition. Then my companion, having seized the other wax-candle, bent forward. Then, he touched my arm without uttering a word. I followed his glance, and I saw on the floor, under the arm-chair by the side of the bed, all white on the dark carpet, open as if to bite, Schopenhauer’s set of artificial teeth.

“The work of decomposition, loosening the jaws, had made it jump out of the mouth.

“I was really frightened that day, Monsieur.”

And as the sun was sinking toward the glittering sea, the consumptive German rose from his seat, gave me a parting bow, and retired into the hotel.

A QUEER NIGHT IN PARIS



MAÎTRE SAVAL, notary at Vernon, was passionately fond of music. Still young, though already bald, always carefully shaved, a little corpulent, as was fitting, wearing a gold *pince-nez* instead of old-fashioned spectacles, active, gallant, and joyous, he passed in Vernon for an artist. He thrummed on the piano and played on the violin, and gave musical evenings where interpretations were given of new operas.

He had even what is called a bit of a voice; nothing but a bit, a very little bit of a voice; but he managed it with so much taste that cries of "Bravo!" "Exquisite!" "Surprising!" "Adorable!" issued from every throat as soon as he had murmured the last note.

He was a subscriber to a music publisher in Paris, who sent all new pieces to him. From time to time to the high society of the town he sent little notes something in this style:

"You are invited to be present on Monday evening at the house of M. Saval, notary, Vernon, at the first production of 'Sais.'"

A few officers, gifted with good voices, formed the chorus. Two or three of the vinedressers' families also sang. The notary filled the part of leader of the orchestra with so much skill that the band-master of the 190th regiment of the line said one day, at the Café de l'Europe:

"Oh! M. Saval is a master. It is a great pity that he did not adopt the career of an artist."

When his name was mentioned in a drawing-room, there was always somebody found to declare: "He is not an amateur; he is an artist, a genuine artist." And two or three persons would repeat, in a tone of profound conviction: "Oh! yes, a genuine artist," laying particular stress on the word "genuine."

Every time that a new work was interpreted at a big Parisian theater, M. Saval paid a visit to the capital. Last year, according to his custom, he went to hear "Henry VIII." He then took the express which arrives in Paris at 4:30 P. M., intending to return by the 12:35 A. M. train so as not to have to sleep at a hotel. He had put on evening dress, a black coat and white tie, which he concealed under his overcoat with the collar turned up.

As soon as he had planted his foot on the Rue d'Amsterdam, he felt in quite a jovial mood, and said to himself:

"Decidedly the air of Paris does not resemble any other air. It has in it something indescribably stimulating, exciting, intoxicating, which fills you with a strange longing to gambol and to do many other

things. As soon as I arrive here, it seems to me, all of a sudden, that I have taken a bottle of champagne. What a life one can lead in this city in the midst of artists! Happy are the elect, the great men who enjoy renown in such a city! What an existence is theirs!"

And he made plans; he would have liked to know some of those celebrated men, to talk about them in Vernon, and to spend an evening with them from time to time in Paris.

But suddenly an idea struck him. He had heard allusions to little *cafés* in the outer boulevards at which well-known painters, men of letters, and even musicians gathered, and he proceeded to go up toward Montmartre at a slow pace.

He had two hours before him. He wanted to have a look round. He passed in front of taverns frequented by belated Bohemians, gazing at the different faces, seeking to discover the artists. Finally, he came to the sign of "The Dead Rat," and, allured by the name, he entered.

Five or six women, with their elbows resting on the marble tables, were talking in low tones about their love affairs, the quarrels of Lucie with Hortense, and the scoundrelism of Octave. They were no longer young, but were fat or thin, tired out, used up. You could see that they were almost bald; and they drank bocks like men.

M. Saval sat down at some distance from them, and waited, for the hour for taking absinthe was at hand.

A tall young man soon came in and took a seat beside him. The landlady called him "M. Romantin."

The notary quivered. Was this the Romantin who had taken a medal at the last Salon?

The young man made a sign to the waiter:

"You will bring up my dinner at once, and then carry to my new studio, 15, Boulevard de Clichy, thirty bottles of beer and the ham I ordered this morning. We are going to have a housewarming."

M. Saval immediately ordered dinner. Then he took off his overcoat, so that his dress coat and his white tie could be seen. His neighbor did not seem to notice him. He had taken up a newspaper, and was reading it. M. Saval glanced sideways at him, burning with the desire to speak to him.

Two young men entered, in red velvet, and peaked beards in the fashion of Henry III. They sat down opposite Romantin.

The first of the pair said:

"It is for this evening?"

Romantin pressed his hand.

"I believe you, old chap, and everyone will be there. I have Bonnat, Guillemet, Gervex, Béraud, Hébert, Duez, Clairin, and Jean-Paul Laurens. It will be a glorious blowout! And women, too! Wait till you see! Every actress without exception—of course I mean, you know, all those who have nothing to do this evening."

The landlord of the establishment came across.

"Do you often have this housewarming?"

The painter replied:

"Certainly—every three months, each quarter."

M. Saval could not restrain himself any longer, and in a hesitating voice said:

"I beg your pardon for intruding on you, Mon-

sieur, but I heard your name pronounced, and I would be very glad to know if you really are M. Romantin whose work in the last Salon I have so much admired."

The painter answered:

"I am the very person, Monsieur."

The notary then paid the artist a very well-turned compliment, showing that he was a man of culture. The painter, gratified, thanked him politely in reply. Then they chatted. Romantin returned to the subject of his housewarming, going into details as to the magnificence of the forthcoming entertainment.

M. Saval questioned him as to all the men he was going to receive, adding:

"It would be an extraordinary piece of good fortune for a stranger, to meet at one time, so many celebrities assembled in the studio of an artist of your rank."

Romantin, overcome, answered: "If it would be agreeable to you, come."

M. Saval accepted the invitation with enthusiasm, reflecting:

"I'll always have time enough to see 'Henry VIII.'"

Both of them had finished their meal. The notary insisted on paying the two bills, wishing to repay his neighbor's civilities. He also paid for the drinks of the young fellows in red velvet; then he left the establishment with the painter.

They stopped in front of a very long house, by no means high, the first story of which had the appearance of an interminable conservatory. Six studios stood in a row with their fronts facing the boulevards.

Romantin was the first to enter. Ascending the stairs, he opened a door, and lighted a match and then a candle.

They found themselves in an immense apartment, the furniture of which consisted of three chairs, two easels, and a few sketches lying on the floor along the walls. M. Saval remained standing at the door in a stupefied state of mind.

The painter remarked:

"Here you are! We've got to the spot; but everything has yet to be done."

Then, examining the high, bare apartment, whose ceiling was veiled in shadows he said:

"We might make a great deal out of this studio."

He walked round it, surveying it with the utmost attention, then went on:

"I have a mistress who might easily give us a helping hand. Women are incomparable for hanging drapery. But I sent her to the country for to-day in order to get her off my hands this evening. It is not that she bores me, but she is too much lacking in the ways of good society. It would be embarrassing to my guests."

He reflected for a few seconds, and then added:

"She is a good girl, but not easy to deal with. If she knew that I was holding a reception, she would tear out my eyes."

M. Saval had not even moved; he did not understand.

The artist came over to him.

"Since I have invited you, you are going to give me some help."

The notary said emphatically:

"Make any use of me you please. I am at your disposal."

Romantin took off his jacket.

"Well, citizen, to work! We are first going to clean up."

He went to the back of the easel, on which there was a canvas representing a cat, and seized a very worn-out broom.

"I say! Just brush up while I look after the lighting."

M. Saval took the broom, inspected it, and then began to sweep the floor very awkwardly, raising a whirlwind of dust.

Romantin, disgusted, stopped him: "Deuce take it! you don't know how to sweep the floor! Look at me!"

And he began to roll before him a heap of grayish sweepings, as if he had done nothing else all his life. Then he gave back the broom to the notary, who imitated him.

In five minutes, such a cloud of dust filled the studio that Romantin asked:

"Where are you? I can't see you any longer."

M. Saval, who was coughing, came nearer to him. The painter said to him:

"How are you going to manage to get up a chandelier."

The other, stunned, asked:

"What chandelier?"

"Why, a chandelier to light—a chandelier with wax-candles."

The notary did not understand.

He answered: "I don't know."

The painter began to jump about, cracking his fingers.

"Well, Monseigneur, I have found out a way."

Then he went more calmly:

"Have you got five francs about you?"

M. Saval replied:

"Why, yes."

The artist said:

"Well! you'll go and buy for me five francs' worth of wax-candles while I go and see the cooper."

And he pushed the notary in his evening coat into the street. At the end of five minutes, they had returned, one of them with the wax-candles, and the other with the hoop of a cask. Then Romantin plunged his hand into a cupboard, and drew forth twenty empty bottles, which he fixed in the form of a crown around the hoop. He then came down, and went to borrow a ladder from the doorkeeper, after having explained that he had obtained the favors of the old woman by painting the portrait of her cat exhibited on the easel.

When he mounted the ladder, he said to M. Saval:

"Are you active?"

The other, without understanding answered:

"Why, yes."

"Well, you just climb up there, and fasten this chandelier for me to the ring of the ceiling. Then you must put a wax-candle in each bottle, and light it. I tell you I have a genius for lighting up. But off with your coat, damn it! you are just like a Jeames."

The door was opened violently. A woman appeared, with her eyes flashing, and remained standing

on the threshold. Romantin gazed at her with a look of terror. She waited some seconds, crossed her arms over her breast, and then in a shrill, vibrating, exasperated voice said:

"Ha! you villain, is this the way you leave me?"

Romantin made no reply. She went on:

"Ha! you scoundrel! You are again doing the swell, while you pack me off to the country. You'll soon see the way I'll settle your jollification. Yes, I'm going to receive your friends."

She grew warmer:

"I'm going to slap their faces with the bottles and the wax-candles."

Romantin uttered one soft word:

"Mathilde."

But she did not pay any attention to him; she went on:

"Wait a little, my fine fellow! wait a little!"

Romantin went over to her, and tried to take her by the hands:

"Mathilde."

But she was now fairly under way; and on she went, emptying the vials of her wrath with strong words and reproaches. They flowed out of her mouth, like a stream sweeping a heap of filth along with it. The words hurled out seemed struggling for exit. She stuttered, stammered, yelled, suddenly recovering her voice to cast forth an insult or a curse.

He seized her hands without her having even noticed it. She did not seem to see anything, so much occupied was she in holding forth and relieving her heart. And suddenly she began to weep. The

tears flowed from her eyes without making her stem the tide of her complaints. But her words had taken a howling, shrieking tone; they were a continuous cry interrupted by sobbings. She commenced afresh twice or three times, till she stopped as if something were choking her, and at last she ceased with a regular flood of tears.

Then he clasped her in his arms and kissed her hair, himself affected.

"Mathilde, my little Mathilde, listen. You must be reasonable. You know, if I give a supper party to my friends, it is to thank these gentlemen for the medal I got at the Salon. I cannot receive women. You ought to understand that. It is not the same with artists as with other people."

She stammered in the midst of her tears:

"Why didn't you tell me this?"

He replied:

"It was in order not to annoy you, not to give you pain. Listen, I'm going to see you home. You will be very sensible, very nice; you will remain quietly waiting for me in bed, and I'll come back as soon as it's over."

She murmured:

"Yes, but you will not begin over again?"

"No, I swear to you!"

He turned toward M. Saval, who had at last hooked on the chandelier:

"My dear friend, I am coming back in five minutes. If anyone arrives in my absence, do the honors for me, will you not?"

And he carried off Mathilde, who kept drying her eyes with her handkerchief as she went along.

Left to himself, M. Saval succeeded in putting everything around him in order. Then he lighted the wax-candles and waited.

He waited for a quarter of an hour, half an hour, an hour. Romantin did not return. Then, suddenly, there was a dreadful noise on the stairs, a song shouted out in chorus by twenty mouths and a regular march like that of a Prussian regiment. The whole house was shaken by the steady tramp of feet. The door flew open, and a motley throng appeared—men and women in a row, holding one another arm in arm, in pairs, and kicking their heels on the floor, in proper time—advancing into the studio like a snake uncoiling itself. They howled:

“Come, let us all be merry,
Pretty maids and soldiers gay!”

M. Saval, thunderstruck, remained standing in evening dress under the chandelier. The procession of revellers caught sight of him, and uttered a shout:

“À Jeames! À Jeames!”

And they began whirling round him, surrounding him with a circle of vociferation. Then they took each other by the hand and went dancing about madly.

He attempted to explain:

“Messieurs—Messieurs—Mesdames—”

But they did not listen to him. They whirled about, they jumped, they brawled.

At last the dancing ceased. M. Saval uttered the word:

“Messieurs—”

A tall young fellow, fair-haired and bearded to the nose, interrupted him:

"What's your name, my friend?"

The notary, quite scared, said:

"I am M. Saval."

A voice exclaimed:

"You mean Baptiste."

A woman said:

"Let the poor waiter alone! You'll end by making him get angry. He's paid to attend on us, and not to be laughed at by us."

Then, M. Saval noticed that each guest had brought his own provisions. One held a bottle of wine, another a pie. This one had a loaf of bread, that one a ham.

The tall, fair, young fellow placed in his hands an enormous sausage, and gave him orders:

"Go and settle up the sideboard in the corner over there. You are to put the bottles at the left and the provisions at the right."

Saval, getting quite distracted, exclaimed:

"But, Messieurs, I am a notary!"

There was a moment's silence and then a wild outburst of laughter. One suspicious gentleman asked:

"How are you here?"

He explained, telling about his project of going to the opera, his departure from Vernon, his arrival in Paris, and the way in which he had spent the evening.

They sat around him to listen to him; they greeted him with words of applause, and called him Scheherazade.

Romantin did not come back. Other guests arrived. M. Saval was presented to them so that he might begin his story over again. He declined; they forced him to relate it. They fixed him on one of three chairs between two women who kept constantly filling his glass. He drank; he laughed; he talked; he sang, too. He tried to waltz with his chair, and fell on the floor.

From that moment, he forgot everything. It seemed to him, however, that they undressed him, put him to bed, and that his stomach got sick.

When he awoke, it was broad daylight, and he lay stretched with his feet against a cupboard, in a strange bed.

An old woman with a broom in her hand was glaring angrily at him. At last, she said:

"Clear out, you blackguard! Clear out! What right has anyone to get drunk like this?"

He sat up in the bed, feeling very ill at ease. He asked:

"Where am I?"

"Where are you, you dirty scamp? You are drunk. Take your rotten carcass out of here as quick as you can,—and lose no time about it!"

He wanted to get up. He found that he was naked in the bed. His clothes had disappeared. He blurted out:

"Madame, I—"

Then he remembered. What was he to do? He asked:

"Did Monsieur Romantin come back?"

The doorkeeper shouted:

"Will you take your dirty carcass out of this so that he at any rate may not catch you here?"

M. Saval said, in a state of confusion:

"I haven't got my clothes; they have been taken away from me."

He had to wait, to explain his situation, give notice to his friends, and borrow some money to buy clothes. He did not leave Paris till evening.

And, when people talk about music to him in his beautiful drawing-room in Vernon, he declares with an air of authority that painting is a very inferior art.

THE UMBRELLA



MME. OREILLE was a very economical woman; she thoroughly knew the value of a half-penny, and possessed a whole storehouse of strict principles with regard to the multiplication of money, so that her cook found the greatest difficulty in making what the servants call their "market-penny," while her husband was hardly allowed any pocket-money at all. They were, however, very comfortably off, and had no children. It really pained Mme. Oreille to see any money spent; it was like tearing at her heartstrings when she had to take any of those nice crownpieces out of her pocket; and whenever she had to spend anything, no matter how necessary it was, she slept badly the next night.

Oreille was continually saying to his wife:

"You really might be more liberal, as we have no children and never spend our income."

"You don't know what may happen," she used to reply. "It is better to have too much than too little."

She was a little woman of about forty, very active, rather hasty, wrinkled, very neat and tidy, and with a very short temper. Her husband very often used to complain of all the privations she made him endure; some of them were particularly painful to him, as they touched his vanity.

He was one of the upper clerks in the War Office, and only stayed there in obedience to his wife's wish, so as to increase their income, which they did not nearly spend.

For two years he had always come to the office with the same old patched umbrella, to the great amusement of his fellow-clerks. At last he got tired of their jokes, and insisted upon his wife buying him a new one. She bought one for eight francs and a-half, one of those cheap things which large houses sell as an advertisement. When the others in the office saw the article, which was being sold in Paris by the thousand, they began their jokes again, and Oreille had a dreadful time of it with them. They even made a song about it, which he heard from morning till night all over the immense building.

Oreille was very angry, and peremptorily told his wife to get him a new one, a good silk one, for twenty francs, and to bring him the bill, so that he might see that it was all right.

She bought him one for eighteen francs, and said, getting red with anger as she gave it to her husband:

"This will last you for five years at least."

Oreille felt quite triumphant, and obtained a small ovation at the office with his new acquisition. When he went home in the evening, his wife said to him, looking at the umbrella uneasily:

"You should not leave it fastened up with the elastic; it will very likely cut the silk. You must take care of it, for I shall not buy you a new one in a hurry."

She took it, unfastened it, and then remained dumfounded with astonishment and rage. In the middle of the silk there was a hole as big as a six-penny-piece, as if made with the end of a cigar.

"What is that?" she screamed.

Her husband replied quietly, without looking at it:

"What is it? What do you mean?"

She was choking with rage and could hardly get out a word.

"You—you—have burned—your umbrella! Why—you must be—mad! Do you wish to ruin us outright?"

He turned round hastily, as if frightened.

"What are you talking about?"

"I say that you have burned your umbrella. Just look here—"

And rushing at him, as if she were going to beat him, she violently thrust the little circular burned hole under his nose.

He was so utterly struck dumb at the sight of it that he could only stammer out:

"What—what is it? How should I know? I have done nothing, I will swear. I don't know what is the matter with the umbrella."

"You have been playing tricks with it at the office; you have been playing the fool and opening it, to show it off!" she screamed.

"I only opened it once, to let them see what a nice one it was, that is all, I declare."

But she shook with rage, and got up one of those conjugal scenes which make a peaceable man dread the domestic hearth more than a battlefield where bullets are raining.

She mended it with a piece of silk cut out of the old umbrella, which was of a different color, and the next day Oreille went off very humbly with the mended article in his hand. He put it into a cupboard, and thought no more of it than of some unpleasant recollection.

But he had scarcely got home that evening when his wife took the umbrella from him, opened it, and nearly had a fit when she saw what had befallen it, for the disaster was now irreparable. It was covered with small holes, which evidently, proceeded from burns, just as if some one had emptied the ashes from a lighted pipe on to it. It was done for utterly, irreparably.

She looked at it without a word, in too great a passion to be able to say anything. He also, when he saw the damage, remained almost dumb, in a state of frightened consternation.

They looked at each other; then he looked on to the floor. The next moment she threw the useless article at his head, screaming out in a transport of the most violent rage, for she had now recovered her voice:

"Oh! you brute! you brute! You did it on purpose, but I will pay you out for it. You shall not have another."

And then the scene began again. After the storm had raged for an hour, he, at last, was enabled to explain himself. He declared that he could not under-

stand it at all, and that it could only proceed from malice or from vengeance.

A ring at the bell saved him; it was a friend whom they were expecting to dinner.

Mme. Oreille submitted the case to him. As for buying a new umbrella, that was out of the question; her husband should not have another. The friend very sensibly said that in that case his clothes would be spoiled, and they were certainly worth more than the umbrella. But the little woman, who was still in a rage, replied:

"Very well, then, when it rains he may have the kitchen umbrella, for I will not give him a new silk one."

Oreille utterly rebelled at such an idea.

"All right," he said; "then I shall resign my post. I am not going to the office with the kitchen umbrella."

The friend interposed:

"Have this one recovered; it will not cost much."

But Mme. Oreille, being in the temper that she was, said:

"It will cost at least eight francs to recover it. Eight and eighteen are twenty-six. Just fancy, twenty-six francs for an umbrella! It is utter madness!"

The friend, who was only a poor man of the middle classes, had an inspiration:

"Make your fire insurance pay for it. The companies pay for all articles that are burned, as long as the damage has been done in your own house."

On hearing this advice the little woman calmed down immediately, and then, after a moment's reflection, she said to her husband:

"To-morrow, before going to your office, you will go to the Maternelle Insurance Company, show them the state your umbrella is in, and make them pay for the damage."

M. Oreille fairly jumped, he was so startled at the proposal.

"I would not do it for my life! It is eighteen francs lost, that is all. It will not ruin us."

The next morning he took a walking-stick when he went out, for, luckily, it was a fine day.

Left at home alone, Mme. Oreille could not get over the loss of her eighteen francs by any means. She had put the umbrella on the dining-room table, and she looked at it without being able to come to any determination.

Every moment she thought of the insurance company, but she did not dare to encounter the quizzical looks of the gentlemen who might receive her, for she was very timid before people, and grew red at a mere nothing, feeling embarrassed when she had to speak to strangers.

But regret at the loss of the eighteen francs pained her as if she had been wounded. She tried not to think of it any more, and yet every moment the recollection of the loss struck her painfully. What was she to do, however? Time went on, and she could not decide; but suddenly, like all cowards, she made up her mind.

"I will go, and we will see what will happen."

But first of all she was obliged to prepare the umbrella so that the disaster might be complete, and the reason of it quite evident. She took a match from the mantelpiece, and between the ribs she burned a

hole as big as the palm of her hand. Then she rolled it up carefully, fastened it with the elastic band, put on her bonnet and shawl, and went quickly toward the Rue de Rivoli, where the insurance office was.

But the nearer she got the slower she walked. What was she going to say, and what reply would she get?

She looked at the numbers of the houses; there were still twenty-eight. That was all right, she had time to consider, and she walked slower and slower. Suddenly she saw a door on which was a large brass plate with "La Maternelle Fire Insurance Office" engraved on it. Already! She waited for a moment, for she felt nervous and almost ashamed; then she went past, came back, went past again, and came back again.

At last she said to herself:

"I must go in, however, so I may as well do it now as later."

She could not help noticing, however, how her heart beat as she entered. She went into an enormous room with grated wicket openings all round, and a man behind each of them, and as a gentleman, carrying a number of papers, passed her, she stopped him and said, timidly:

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur, but can you tell me where I must apply for payment for anything that has been accidentally burned?"

He replied in a sonorous voice:

"The first door on the left; that is the department you want."

This frightened her still more, and she felt inclined to run away, to make no claim, to sacrifice her eighteen francs. But the idea of that sum revived her

courage, and she went upstairs, out of breath, stopping at almost every other step.

She knocked at a door which she saw on the first landing, and a clear voice said, in answer:

“Come in!”

She obeyed mechanically, and found herself in a large room where three solemn gentlemen, each with a decoration in his buttonhole, were standing talking.

One of them asked her: “What do you want, Madame?”

She could hardly get out her words, but stammered: “I have come—I have come on account of an accident, something—”

He very politely pointed out a seat to her.

“If you will kindly sit down I will attend to you in a moment.”

And, returning to the other two, he went on with the conversation.

“The company, gentlemen, does not consider that it is under any obligation to you for more than four hundred thousand francs, and we can pay no attention to your claim to the further sum of a hundred thousand, which you wish to make us pay. Besides that, the surveyor’s valuation—”

One of the others interrupted him:

“That is quite enough, Monsieur; the law-courts will decide between us, and we have nothing further to do than to take our leave.” And they went out after mutual ceremonious bows.

Oh! if she could only have gone away with them, how gladly she would have done it; she would have run away and given up everything. But it was too late, for the gentleman came back, and said, bowing:

"What can I do for you, Madame?"

She could scarcely speak, but at last she managed to say:

"I have come—for this "

The manager looked at the object which she held out to him in mute astonishment. With trembling fingers she tried to undo the elastic, and succeeded, after several attempts, and hastily opened the damaged remains of the umbrella.

"It looks to me to be in a very bad state of health," he said, compassionately.

"It cost me twenty francs," she said, with some hesitation.

He seemed astonished. "Really! As much as that?"

"Yes, it was a capital article, and I wanted you to see the state it is in."

"Very well, I see; very well. But I really do not understand what it can have to do with me."

She began to feel uncomfortable; perhaps this company did not pay for such small articles, and she said:

"But—it is burned."

He could not deny it.

"I see that very well," he replied.

She remained open-mouthed, not knowing what to say next; then suddenly forgetting that she had left out the main thing, she said hastily:

"I am Mme. Oreille; we are assured in La Maternelle, and I have come to claim the value of this damage. I only want you to have it recovered," she added quickly, fearing a positive refusal.

The manager was rather embarrassed, and said:

"But, really, Madame, we do not sell umbrellas; we cannot undertake such kinds of repairs."

The little woman felt her courage reviving; she was not going to give up without a struggle; she was not even afraid now, so she said:

"I only want you to pay me the cost of repairing it; I can quite well get it done myself."

The gentleman seemed rather confused.

"Really, Madame, it is such a very small matter! We are never asked to give compensation for such trivial losses. You must allow that we cannot make good pocket-handkerchiefs, gloves, brooms, slippers, all the small articles which are every day exposed to the chances of being burned."

She got red, and felt inclined to fly into a rage.

"But, Monsieur, last December one of our chimneys caught fire, and caused at least five hundred francs' damage. M. Oreille made no claim on the company, and so it is only just that it should pay for my umbrella now."

The manager, guessing that she was telling a lie, said, with a smile:

"You must acknowledge, Madame, that it is very surprising that M. Oreille should have asked no compensation for damages amounting to five hundred francs, and should now claim five or six francs for mending an umbrella."

She was not the least put out, and replied:

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur, the five hundred francs affected M. Oreille's pocket, whereas this damage, amounting to eighteen francs, concerns Mme. Oreille's pocket only. which is a totally different matter."

As he saw that he had no chance of getting rid of her, and that he would only be wasting his time, he said, resignedly:

"Will you kindly tell me how the damage was done?"

She felt that she had won the victory, and said:

"This is how it happened, Monsieur: In our hall there is a bronze stick- and umbrella-stand, and the other day, when I came in, I put my umbrella into it. I must tell you that just above there is a shelf for the candlesticks and matches. I put out my hand, took three or four matches, and struck one, but it missed fire, so I struck another, which ignited, but went out immediately, and a third did the same."

The manager interrupted her, to make a joke.

"I suppose they were Government matches, then?"

She did not understand him, and went on:

"Very likely. At any rate, the fourth caught fire, and I lit my candle, and went into my room to go to bed; but in a quarter-of-an-hour I fancied that I smelled something burning, and I have always been terribly afraid of fire. If ever we have an accident it will not be my fault, I assure you. I am terribly nervous since our chimney was on fire, as I told you; so I got up, and hunted about everywhere, sniffing like a dog after game, and at last I noticed that my umbrella was burning. Most likely a match had fallen between the folds and burned it. You can see how it has damaged it."

The manager had taken his clue, and asked her:

"What do you estimate the damage at?"

She did not know what to say, as she was not certain what amount to put on it, but at last she replied:

"Perhaps you had better get it done yourself. I will leave it to you."

He, however, naturally refused.

"No, Madame, I cannot do that. Tell me the amount of your claim, that is all I want to know."

"Well!—I think that— Look here, Monsieur, I do not want to make any money out of you, so I will tell you what we will do. I will take my umbrella to the maker, who will recover it in good, durable silk, and I will bring the bill to you. Will that suit you, Monsieur?"

"Perfectly, Madame; we will settle it on that basis. Here is a note for the cashier, who will repay you whatever it costs you."

He gave Mme. Oreille a slip of paper. She took it, got up, and went out, thanking him, for she was in a hurry to escape lest he should change his mind.

She went briskly through the streets, looking out for a really good umbrella-maker, and when she found a shop which appeared to be a first-class one, she went in, and said, confidently:

"I want this umbrella recovered in silk, good silk. Use the very best and strongest you have; I don't mind what it costs."

THE QUESTION OF LATIN



THIS question of Latin, with which we were so much bothered some time since, recalls to my mind a story—a story of my youth.

I was finishing my studies with a teacher, in a big central town, at the Institution Robineau, celebrated through the entire province owing to the special attention paid there to Latin studies.

For the past ten years, the Institution Robineau beat at every competitive examination the Imperial “lycée” of the town, and all the colleges of the Subprefecture; and these constant successes were due, they said, to an usher, a simple usher, M. Piquedent, or rather Père Piquedent.

He was one of those middle-aged men, quite gray, whose real age it is impossible to know, and whose history we can guess at a first glance. Having entered as an usher at twenty into the first institution that presented itself so that he could proceed to take out his degree of Master of Arts first, and afterward the degree of Doctor of Laws, he found himself so

much enmeshed in this sinister life that he remained an usher all his life. But his love for Latin did not leave him, but harassed him like an unhealthy passion. He continued to read the poets, the prose-writers, the historians, to interpret them, to study their meaning, to comment on them with a perseverance bordering on madness.

One day, the idea came into his head to force all the students of his class to answer him in Latin only; and he persisted in this resolution until at last they were capable of sustaining an entire conversation with him just as they would in their mother-tongue. He listened to them, as a leader of an orchestra listens to his musicians rehearsing, and, striking his desk every moment with his ruler, he exclaimed:

"Monsieur Lefrère, Monsieur Lefrère, you are committing a solecism! You are not recalling the rule to mind.

"Monsieur Plantel, your turn of phrase is altogether French and in no way Latin. You must understand the genius of a language. Look here, listen to me."

Now it came to pass that the pupils of the Institution Robineau carried off, at the end of the year, all the prizes for composition, translation, and Latin conversation.

Next year, the principal, a little man, as cunning as an ape, and with the same grinning and grotesque physique, got printed on his programmes, on his advertisements, and painted on the door of his institution:

"Latin Studies a Speciality. Five first prizes carried off in the five classes of the lycée.

"Two prizes of honor at the general Competitive Examinations with all the lycées and colleges of France."

For ten years the Institution Robineau triumphed in the same fashion. Now, my father, allured by these successes, sent me as a day-pupil to Robineau's—or, as we called it, Robinetto or Robinettino—and made me take special private lessons from Père Piquedent at the rate of five francs per hour, out of which the usher got two francs and the principal three francs. I was at the time in my eighteenth year, and was in the philosophy class.

These private lessons were given in a little room looking out on the street. It so happened that Père Piquedent, instead of talking Latin to me, as he did when teaching publicly in the Institution, kept telling about his troubles in French. Without relations, without friends, the poor man conceived an attachment for me, and poured out into my heart his own misery.

He had never for the last ten or fifteen years chatted confidentially with anyone.

"I am like an oak in a desert," he said—" *sicut quercus in solitudine*."

The other ushers disgusted him. He knew nobody in the town since he had no liberty for the purpose of making acquaintances.

"Not even the nights, my friend, and that is the hardest thing on me. The dream of my life is to have a room of my own with furniture, my own books, little things that belonged to myself and which others could not touch. And I have nothing of my own, nothing except my shirt and my frock-coat,

nothing, not even my mattress and my pillow! I have not four walls to shut myself up in, except when I come to give a lesson in this room. Do you see what this means—a man forced to spend his life without ever having the right, without ever finding the time to shut himself up all alone, no matter where, to think, to reflect, to work, to dream? Ah! my dear boy, a key, the key of a door which one can open—this is happiness, mark you, the only happiness!

“Here, all day long, the study with all those dirty brats jumping about in it, and during the night the dormitory with the same dirty brats snoring. And I have to sleep in the public bed at the end of two rows of beds occupied by these brats whom I must look after. I can never be alone, never! If I go out, I find the street full of people, and, when I am tired of walking, I go into some *café* crowded with smokers and billiard players. I tell you that it is a regular prison.”

I asked him:

“Why did you not take up some other line, Monsieur Piquedent?”

He exclaimed:

“What, my little friend? I am not a bootmaker or a joiner or a hatter or a baker or a hairdresser. I only know Latin, and I have not the diploma which would enable me to sell my knowledge at a high price. If I were a doctor, I would sell for a hundred francs what I now sell for a hundred sous; and I would supply it probably of an inferior quality, for my academic rank would be enough to sustain my reputation.”

Sometimes, he would say to me:

"I have no rest in life except in the hours spent with you. Don't be afraid! you'll lose nothing by that. I'll make it up to you in the study by teaching you to speak twice as much Latin as the others."

One day, I grew bolder and offered him a cigarette. He stared at me with astonishment at first, then he gave a glance toward the door:

"If anyone were to come in, my dear boy!"

"Well, let us smoke at the window," said I.

And we went and leaned with our elbows on the window-sill facing the street, keeping our hands over the little rolls of tobacco wrapped up in tissue-paper so that they concealed them from view like a shell. Just opposite to us was a laundry. Four women in white bodices were passing over the linen spread out before them the heavy and hot irons, letting a damp fume escape from them.

Suddenly, another, a fifth carrying on her arm a large basket which made her back stoop, came out to bring the customers their shirts and chemises, their handkerchiefs and their sheets. She stopped on the threshold as if she were already fatigued; then, she raised her eyes, smiled when she saw us smoking, flung at us, with her left hand, which was free, the sly kiss characteristic of a free-and-easy working-woman; and she went away at a slow pace dragging her shoes after her.

She was a damsel of about twenty, small, rather thin, pale, rather pretty, with the manners of a street-wench, and eyes laughing under her ill-combed fair hair.

Père Piquedent, affected, began murmuring:

"What an occupation for a woman. Really a trade, only fit for a horse."

And he spoke with emotion about the misery of the people. He had a heart which swelled with lofty democratic sentiment, and he referred to the fatiguing pursuits of the working class with phrases borrowed from Jean-Jacques Rousseau and with sobs in his throat.

Next day, as we were resting our elbows at the same window, the same workwoman perceived us, and cried out to us:

"Good day, my scholars!" in a comical sort of tone, while she made a contemptuous gesture with her hands.

I flung her a cigarette, which she immediately began to smoke. And the four other ironers rushed out to the door with outstretched hands to get cigarettes also.

And, each day, a friendly relationship was being formed between the working-women of the pavement and the idlers of the boarding-school.

Père Piquedent was really a comic sight to look at. He trembled at being noticed, for he might have lost his place; and he made timid and ridiculous gestures, quite a theatrical display of amorousness, to which the women responded with a regular fusillade of kisses.

A perfidious idea sprang up in my head. One day, on entering our room, I said to the old usher in a low tone:

"You would not believe it, Monsieur Piquedent, I met the little washerwoman! You know the one—the woman who had the basket—and I spoke to her!"

He asked, rather excited by the tone I had taken:
"What did she say to you?"

"She said to me—goodness gracious!—she said she thought you were very nice. The fact of the matter is, I believe—I believe—that she is a little in love with you." I saw that he was growing pale. He exclaimed:

"She is laughing at me, of course. These things don't happen at my age."

I said gravely:

"How is that? You are very nice."

As I felt that my trick had produced its effect on him, I did not press the matter.

But every day I pretended that I had met the little laundress and that I had spoken to her about him, so that in the end he believed me, and sent her ardent and earnest kisses.

Now, it happened that, one morning, on my way to the boarding-school, I really came across her. I accosted her without hesitation, as if I had known her for the last ten years.

"Good day, Mademoiselle. Are you quite well?"

"Very well, Monsieur, thank you."

"Will you have a cigarette?"

"Oh! not in the street."

"You can smoke it at home."

"In that case, I will."

"Let me tell you, Mademoiselle, there's something you don't know."

"What is that, Monsieur?"

"The old gentleman—my old professor, I mean—"

"Père Piquedent."

"Yes, Père Piquedent. So you know his name?"

"Faith, I do! What of that?"

"Well, he is in love with you!"

She burst out laughing like a crazy woman and exclaimed:

"This is only humbug!"

"Oh! no, 'tis no humbug! He keeps talking of you all the time he is giving lessons. I bet that he'll marry you!"

She ceased laughing. The idea of marriage makes every girl serious. Then, she repeated, with an incredulous air:

"This is humbug!"

"I swear to you 'tis true."

She picked up her basket which she had laid down at her feet.

"Well, we'll see," she said. And she went away.

Presently, when I had reached the boarding-school, I took Père Piquedent aside, and said:

"You must write to her: she is mad about you."

And he wrote a long letter of a soft and affectionate character full of phrases and circumlocutions, metaphors and similes, philosophy and academic gallantry; and I took on myself the responsibility of delivering it to the young woman.

She read it with gravity, with emotion; then, she murmured:

"How well he writes! It is easy to see he has got education! Does he really mean to marry me?"

I replied intrepidly: "Faith, he has lost his head about you!"

"Then he must invite me to dinner on Sunday at the Île des Fleurs."

I promised that she would be invited.

Père Piquedent was much touched by everything I told him about her.

I added:

"She loves you, Monsieur Piquedent, and I believe her to be a decent girl. It is not right to seduce her and then abandon her."

He replied in a firm tone:

"I hope I, too, am a decent man, my friend."

I confess I had at the time no plan. I was playing a practical joke, a schoolboy's practical joke, nothing more. I had been aware of the simplicity of the old usher, his innocence, and his weakness. I amused myself without asking myself how it would turn out. I was eighteen, and had been for a long time looked upon at the lycée as a knowing practical joker.

So, it was agreed that Père Piquedent and I should set out in a hackney-coach for the ferry of Queue de Vache, that we should there pick up Angèle, and that I should get them to come into my boat, for at this time I was fond of boating. I would then bring them to the Île de Fleurs, where the three of us would dine. I had made it my business to be present, in order the better to enjoy my triumph, and the usher, consenting to my arrangement, proved clearly, in fact, that he had lost his head by thus risking his post.

When we arrived at the ferry where my boat had been moored since morning, I saw in the grass, or rather above the tall weeds of the bank, an enormous red parasol, resembling a monstrous wild poppy. Under the parasol waited the little laundress in her

Sunday clothes. I was surprised. She was really nice-looking, though pale, and graceful, though with a suburban gracefulness.

Père Piquedent raised his hat and bowed. She put out her hand toward him and they stared at one another without uttering a word. Then they stepped into my boat and I took the oars.

They were seated side by side on the seat near the stern. The usher was the first to speak:

"This is nice weather for a row in a boat."

She murmured: "Oh! yes."

She drew her hand through the current, skimming the water with her fingers, which raised up a thin transparent little stream like a sheet of glass. It made a light sound, a gentle ripple, as the boat moved along.

When they were in the restaurant, she took it on herself to speak, and ordered dinner—fried fish, a chicken, and salad; then, she led us on toward the isle, which she knew perfectly.

After this, she was gay, romping, and even rather mocking.

Up to the dessert, no question of love arose. I had treated them to champagne and Père Piquedent was tipsy. Herself slightly elevated, she called out to him:

"Monsieur Piquenez."

He said all of a sudden:

"Mademoiselle, Monsieur Raoul has communicated my sentiments to you."

She became as serious as a judge:

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Are you going to give any answer?"

"We never reply to these questions!"

He panted with emotion, and went on:

"After all, a day will come when I may make you like me."

She smiled: "You big fool! You are very nice."

"In short, Mademoiselle, do you think that, later on, we might—"

She hesitated a second; then in a trembling voice she said:

"Is it in order to marry me you say that? For never otherwise, you know."

"Yes, Mademoiselle!"

"Well, that's all right, Monsieur Piquedent!"

It is thus that these two silly creatures promised marriage to each other through the wiles of a reckless schoolboy. But I did not believe that it was serious, nor indeed did they themselves, perhaps.

On her part there was a certain feeling of hesitation:

"You know, I have nothing—not four sous."

He stammered, for he was as drunk as Silenus:

"I have saved five thousand francs."

She exclaimed triumphantly:

"Then we can set up in business!"

He became restless: "In what business?"

"What do I know about that? We shall see. With five thousand francs, we could do many things. You don't want me to go and live in your boarding-school, do you?"

He had not looked forward so far as this, and he stammered in great perplexity:

"What business could we set up in? It is not convenient, for all I know is Latin!"

She reflected in her turn, passing in review all the professions which she had longed for.

"You could not be a doctor?"

"No, I have not the diploma."

"Or a chemist?"

"No more than the other."

She uttered a cry, a cry of joy. She had discovered it.

"Then we'll buy a grocer's shop! Oh! what luck! we'll buy a grocer's shop! Not on a big scale, all the same; with five thousand francs one cannot go far."

He was shocked at the suggestion:

"No, I can't be a grocer. I am—I am—too well known. I only know Latin—that's all I know."

But she poured a glass of champagne down his throat. He drank it and was silent.

We got back into the boat. The night was dark, very dark. I saw clearly, however, that he had caught her by the waist, and that they were hugging each other again and again.

It was a frightful catastrophe. Our escapade was discovered with the result that Père Piquedent was dismissed. And my father, in a fit of anger, sent me to finish my course of philosophy at Ribaudet's School.

Six months later I passed for my degree of Bachelor of Arts. Then I went to study law in Paris, and I did not return to my native town till ten years after.

At the corner of the Rue de Serpent, a shop caught my eye. Over the door were the words: "Colonial products—Piquedent"; then underneath so as to enlighten the most ignorant: "Grocery."

I exclaimed: "*Quantum mutatus ab illo!*"

He raised his head, left his female customer, and rushed toward me with outstretched hands.

"Ah! my young friend, my young friend, here you are! What luck! What luck!"

A beautiful woman, very plump, abruptly left the counter and flung herself on my breast. I had some difficulty in recognizing her, so fat had she grown.

I asked: "So then you're going on well?"

Piquedent had gone back to weigh the groceries:

"Oh! very well, very well, very well. I have made three thousand francs clear this year!"

"And what about the Latin, Monsieur Piquedent?"

"Oh! goodness gracious! the Latin—the Latin—the Latin. Well, you see, it does not keep the pot boiling!"

HE ?*



MY DEAR friend, you cannot understand it by any possible means, you say, and I perfectly believe you. You think I am going mad? It may be so, but not for the reasons which you suppose.

Yes, I am going to get married, and I will tell you what has led me to take that step.

My ideas and my convictions have not changed at all. I look upon all legalized cohabitation as utterly stupid, for I am certain that nine husbands out of ten are cuckolds; and they get no more than their deserts for having been idiotic enough to fetter their lives and renounce their freedom in love, the only happy and good thing in the world, and for having clipped the wings of fancy which continually drives us on toward all women. You know what I mean. More than ever I feel that I am incapable of loving one woman alone, because

*It was in this story that the first gleams of De Maupassant's approaching madness became apparent. Thenceforward he began to revel in the strange and terrible, until his malady had seized him wholly. "The Diary of a Madman," is in a similar vein.

I shall always adore all the others too much. I should like to have a thousand arms, a thousand mouths, and a thousand—*temperaments*, to be able to strain an army of these charming creatures in my embrace at the same moment.

And yet I am going to get married!

I may add that I know very little of the girl who is going to become my wife to-morrow; I have only seen her four or five times. I know that there is nothing displeasing about her, and that is enough for my purpose. She is small, fair, and stout; so of course the day after to-morrow I shall ardently wish for a tall, dark, thin woman.

She is not rich, and belongs to the middle classes. She is a girl such as you may find by the gross, well adapted for matrimony, without any apparent faults, and with no particularly striking qualities. People say of her: "Mlle. Lajolle is a very nice girl," and to-morrow they will say: "What a very nice woman Madame Raymon is." She belongs, in a word, to that immense number of girls who make very good wives for us till the moment comes when we discover that we happen to prefer all other women to that particular woman we have married.

"Well," you will say to me, "what on earth do you get married for?"

I hardly like to tell you the strange and seemingly improbable reason that urged me on to this senseless act; the fact, however, is that I am frightened of being alone!

I don't know how to tell you or to make you understand me, but my state of mind is so wretched that you will pity me and despise me.

I do not want to be alone any longer at night; I want to feel that there is some one close to me touching me, a being who can speak and say something, no matter what it be.

I wish to be able to awaken somebody by my side, so that I may be able to ask some sudden question, a stupid question even, if I feel inclined, so that I may hear a human voice, and feel that there is some waking soul close to me, some one whose reason is at work—so that when I hastily light the candle I may see some human face by my side—because—because—I am ashamed to confess it—because I am afraid of being alone.

Oh! you don't understand me yet.

I am not afraid of any danger; if a man were to come into the room I should kill him without trembling. I am not afraid of ghosts, nor do I believe in the supernatural. I am not afraid of dead people, for I believe in the total annihilation of every being that disappears from the face of this earth.

Well,—yes, well, it must be told; I am afraid of myself, afraid of that horrible sensation of incomprehensible fear.

You may laugh, if you like. It is terrible and I cannot get over it. I am afraid of the walls, of the furniture, of the familiar objects, which are animated, as far as I am concerned, by a kind of animal life. Above all, I am afraid of my own dreadful thoughts, of my reason, which seems as if it were about to leave me, driven away by a mysterious and invisible agony.

At first I feel a vague uneasiness in my mind which causes a cold shiver to run all over me. I

look round, and of course nothing is to be seen, and I wish there were something there, no matter what, as long as it were something tangible: I am frightened, merely because I cannot understand my own terror.

If I speak, I am afraid of my own voice. If I walk, I am afraid of I know not what, behind the door, behind the curtains, in the cupboard, or under my bed, and yet all the time I know there is nothing anywhere, and I turn round suddenly because I am afraid of what is behind me, although there is nothing there, and I know it.

I get agitated; I feel that my fear increases, and so I shut myself up in my own room, get into bed, and hide under the clothes, and there, cowering down rolled into a ball, I close my eyes in despair and remain thus for an indefinite time, remembering that my candle is alight on the table by my bedside, and that I ought to put it out, and yet—I dare not do it!

It is very terrible, is it not, to be like that?

Formerly I felt nothing of all that; I came home quite comfortably, and went up and down in my rooms without anything disturbing my calmness of mind. Had anyone told me that I should be attacked by a malady—for I can call it nothing else—of most improbable fear, such a stupid and terrible malady as it is, I should have laughed outright. I was certainly never afraid of opening the door in the dark; I used to go to bed slowly without locking it, and never got up in the middle of the night to make sure that everything was firmly closed.

It began last year in a very strange manner, on a damp autumn evening. When my servant had left

the room, after I had dined, I asked myself what I was going to do. I walked up and down my room for some time, feeling tired without any reason for it, unable to work, and without enough energy to read. A fine rain was falling, and I felt unhappy, a prey to one of those fits of casual despondency which make us feel inclined to cry, or to talk, no matter to whom, so as to shake off our depressing thoughts.

I felt that I was alone and that my rooms seemed to me to be more empty than they had ever been before. I was surrounded by a sensation of infinite and overwhelming solitude. What was I to do? I sat down, but then a kind of nervous impatience agitated my legs, so that I got up and began to walk about again. I was feverish, for my hands, which I had clasped behind me, as one often does when walking slowly, almost seemed to burn one another. Then suddenly a cold shiver ran down my back, and I thought the damp air might have penetrated into my room, so I lit the fire for the first time that year, and sat down again and looked at the flames. But soon I felt that I could not possibly remain quiet. So I got up again and determined to go out, to pull myself together, and to seek a friend to bear me company.

I could not find anyone, so I went on to the boulevards to try and meet some acquaintance or other there.

I was wretched everywhere, and the wet pavement glistened in the gaslight, while the oppressive mist of the almost impalpable rain lay heavily over the streets and seemed to obscure the light from the lamps.

I went on slowly, saying to myself, "I shall not find a soul to talk to."

I glanced into several *cafés*, from the Madeleine as far as the Faubourg Poissonnière, and saw many unhappy-looking individuals sitting at the tables, who did not seem even to have enough energy left to finish the refreshments they had ordered.

For a long time I wandered aimlessly up and down, and about midnight I started off for home; I was very calm and very tired. My *concierge** opened the door at once, which was quite unusual for him, and I thought that another lodger had no doubt just come in.

When I go out I always double-lock the door of my room. Now I found it merely closed, which surprised me; but I supposed that some letters had been brought up for me in the course of the evening.

I went in, and found my fire still burning so that it lighted up the room a little. In the act of taking up a candle, I noticed somebody sitting in my arm-chair by the fire, warming his feet, with his back toward me.

I was not in the slightest degree frightened. I thought very naturally that some friend or other had come to see me. No doubt the porter, whom I had told when I went out, had lent him his own key. In a moment I remembered all the circumstances of my return, how the street door had been opened immediately, and that my own door was only latched, and not locked.

* Hall-porter.

I could see nothing of my friend but his head. He had evidently gone to sleep while waiting for me, so I went up to him to rouse him. I saw him quite clearly; his right arm was hanging down and his legs were crossed, while his head, which was somewhat inclined to the left of the armchair, seemed to indicate that he was asleep. "Who can it be?" I asked myself. I could not see clearly, as the room was rather dark, so I put out my hand to touch him on the shoulder, and it came in contact with the back of the chair. There was nobody there; the seat was empty.

I fairly jumped with fright. For a moment I drew back as if some terrible danger had suddenly appeared in my way; then I turned round again, impelled by some imperious desire to look at the armchair again. I remained standing upright, panting with fear, so upset that I could not collect my thoughts, and ready to drop.

But I am naturally a cool man, and soon recovered myself. I thought: "It is a mere hallucination, that is all," and I immediately began to reflect about this phenomenon. Thoughts fly very quickly at such moments.

I had been suffering from a hallucination, that was an incontestable fact. My mind had been perfectly lucid and had acted regularly and logically, so there was nothing the matter with the brain. It was only my eyes that had been deceived; they had had a vision, one of those visions which lead simple folk to believe in miracles. It was a nervous accident to the optical apparatus, nothing more; the eyes were rather overwrought, perhaps.

I lit my candle, and when I stooped down to the fire in so doing, I noticed that I was trembling, and I raised myself up with a jump, as if somebody had touched me from behind.

I was certainly not by any means reassured.

I walked up and down a little, and hummed a tune or two. Then I double-locked my door, and felt rather reassured; now, at any rate, nobody could come in.

I sat down again, and thought over my adventure for a long time; then I went to bed, and put out my light.

For some minutes all went well; I lay quietly on my back. Then an irresistible desire seized me to look round the room, and I turned on to my side.

My fire was nearly out and the few glowing embers threw a faint light on to the floor by the chair, where I fancied I saw the man sitting again.

I quickly struck a match, but I had been mistaken, for there was nothing there; I got up, however, and hid the chair behind my bed, and tried to get to sleep as the room was now dark. But I had not forgotten myself for more than five minutes when in my dream I saw all the scene which I had witnessed as clearly as if it were reality. I woke up with a start, and, having lit the candle, sat up in bed, without venturing even to try and go to sleep again.

Twice, however, sleep overcame me for a few moments in spite of myself, and twice I saw the same thing again, till I fancied I was going mad. When day broke, however, I thought that I was cured, and slept peacefully till noon.

It was all past and over. I had been feverish, had had the nightmare; I don't know what. I had been ill, in a word, but yet I thought that I was a great fool.

I enjoyed myself thoroughly that evening; I went and dined at a restaurant; afterward I went to the theater, and then started home. But as I got near the house I was seized by a strange feeling of uneasiness once more; I was afraid of *seeing* him again. I was not afraid of him, not afraid of his presence, in which I did not believe; but I was afraid of being deceived again; I was afraid of some fresh hallucination, afraid lest fear should take possession of me.

For more than an hour I wandered up and down the pavement; then I thought that I was really too foolish, and returned home. I panted so that I could scarcely get upstairs, and remained standing outside my door for more than ten minutes; then suddenly I took courage and pulled myself together. I inserted my key into the lock, and went in with a candle in my hand. I kicked open my half-open bedroom door, and gave a frightened look toward the fireplace; there was nothing there. A—h!

What a relief and what a delight! What a deliverance! I walked up and down briskly and boldly, but I was not altogether reassured, and kept turning round with a jump; the very shadows in the corners disquieted me.

I slept badly, and was constantly disturbed by imaginary noises, but I did not see *him*; no, that was all over.

Since that time I have been afraid of being alone at night. I feel that the specter is there, close to me, around me; but it has not appeared to me again.

And supposing it did, what would it matter, since I do not believe in it and know that it is nothing?

It still worries me, however, because I am constantly thinking of it: *his right arm hanging down and his head inclined to the left like a man who was asleep*—Enough of that, in Heaven's name! I don't want to think about it!

Why, however, am I so persistently possessed with this idea? His feet were close to the fire!

He haunts me; it is very stupid, but so it is. Who and what is HE? I know that he does not exist except in my cowardly imagination, in my fears, and in my agony! There—enough of that!

Yes, it is all very well for me to reason with myself, *to stiffen myself*, so to say; but I cannot remain at home, because I know he is there. I know I shall not see him again; he will not show himself again; that is all over. But he is there all the same in my thoughts. He remains invisible, but that does not prevent his being there. He is behind the doors, in the closed cupboards, in the wardrobe, under the bed, in every dark corner. If I open the door or the cupboard, if I take the candle to look under the bed and throw a light on to the dark places, he is there no longer, but I feel that he is behind me. I turn round, certain that I shall not see him, that I shall never see him again; but he is, none the less, behind me.

It is very stupid, it is dreadful; but what am I to do? I cannot help it.

But if there were two of us in the place, I feel certain that he would not be there any longer, for he is there just because I am alone, simply and solely because I am alone!

LETTER FOUND ON A CORPSE



YOU ask me, Madame, whether I am laughing at you? You cannot believe that a man has never been smitten with love. Well, no, I have never loved, never!

What is the cause of this? I really cannot tell. Never have I been under the influence of that sort of intoxication of the heart which we call love! Never have I lived in that dream, in that exaltation, in that state of madness into which the image of a woman casts us. I have never been pursued, haunted, roused to fever-heat, lifted up to Paradise by the thought of meeting, or by the possession of, a being who had suddenly become for me more desirable than any good fortune, more beautiful than any other creature, more important than the whole world! I have never wept, I have never suffered on account of any of you. I have not passed my nights thinking of one woman without closing my eyes. I have no experience of waking up with the thought and the mem-

ory of her shedding their illumination on me. I have never known the wild desperation of hope when she was about to come, or the divine sadness of regret when she parted with me, leaving behind her in the room a delicate odor of violet-powder.

I have never been in love.

I, too, have often asked myself why is this. And truly I can scarcely tell. Nevertheless, I have found some reasons for it; but they are of a metaphysical character, and perhaps you will not be able to appreciate them.

I suppose I sit too much in judgment on women to submit much to their fascination. I ask you to forgive me for this remark. I am going to explain what I mean. In every creature there is a moral being and a physical being. In order to love, it would be necessary for me to find a harmony between these two beings which I have never found. One has always too great a predominance over the other, sometimes the moral, sometimes the physical.

The intellect which we have a right to require in a woman, in order to love her, is not the same as virile intellect. It is more and it is less. A woman must have a mind open, delicate, sensitive, refined, impressionable. She has no need of either power or initiative in thought, but she must have kindness, elegance, tenderness, coquetry, and that faculty of assimilation which, in a little while, raises her to an equality with him who shares her life. Her greatest quality must be tact, that subtle sense which is to the mind what touch is to the body. It reveals to her a thousand little things, contours, angles, and forms in the intellectual life.

Very frequently pretty women have not intellect to correspond with their personal charms. Now the slightest lack of harmony strikes me and pains me at the first glance. In friendship, this is not of importance. Friendship is a compact in which one fairly divides defects and merits. We may judge of friends, whether man or woman, take into account the good they possess, neglect the evil that is in them, and appreciate their value exactly, while giving ourselves up to an intimate sympathy of a deep and fascinating character.

In order to love, one must be blind, surrender oneself absolutely, see nothing, reason from nothing, understand nothing. One must adore the weakness as well as the beauty of the beloved object, renounce all judgment, all reflection, all perspicacity.

I am incapable of such blindness, and rebel against a seductiveness not founded on reason. This is not all. I have such a high and subtle idea of harmony that nothing can ever realize my ideal. But you will call me a madman. Listen to me. A woman, in my opinion, may have an exquisite soul and a charming body without that body and that soul being in perfect accord with one another. I mean that persons who have noses made in a certain shape are not to be expected to think in a certain fashion. The fat have no right to make use of the same words and phrases as the thin. You, who have blue eyes, Madame, cannot look at life, and judge of things and events as if you had black eyes. The shades of your eyes should correspond, by a sort of fatality, with the shades of your thought. In perceiving these things I have the scent of a bloodhound. Laugh if you like, but it is so.

And yet I imagined that I was in love for an hour, for a day. I had foolishly yielded to the influence of surrounding circumstances. I allowed myself to be beguiled by the mirage of an aurora. Would you like to hear this short history?

* * * * *

I met, one evening, a pretty, enthusiastic woman who wanted, for the purpose of humoring a poetic fancy, to spend a night with me in a boat on a river. I would have preferred—but, no matter, I consented.

It was in the month of June. My fair companion chose a moonlight night in order to excite her imagination all the better.

We had dined at a riverside inn, and then we set out in the boat about ten o'clock. I thought it a rather foolish kind of adventure; but as my companion pleased me I did not bother myself too much about this. I sat down on the seat facing her, seized the oars, and off we started.

I could not deny that the scene was picturesque. We glided past a wooded isle full of nightingales, and the current carried us rapidly over the river covered with silvery ripples. The grasshoppers uttered their shrill, monotonous cry; the frogs croaked in the grass by the river's bank, and the lapping of the water as it flowed on made around us a kind of confused, almost imperceptible murmur, disquieting, which gave us a vague sensation of mysterious fear.

The sweet charm of warm nights and of streams glittering in the moonlight penetrated us. It seemed bliss to live and to float thus, to dream and to feel by one's side a young woman sympathetic and beautiful.

I was somewhat affected, somewhat agitated, somewhat intoxicated by the pale brightness of the night and the consciousness of my proximity to a lovely woman.

"Come and sit beside me," she said.

I obeyed. She went on:

"Recite some verses for me."

This appeared to me rather too much. I declined; she persisted. She certainly wanted to have the utmost pleasure, the whole orchestra of sentiment, from the moon to the rhymes of poets. In the end, I had to yield, and, as if in mockery, I recited for her a charming little poem by Louis Bouilhet, of which the following are a few strophes:

"I hate the poet who with tearful eye
Murmurs some name while gazing tow'rds a star,
Who sees no magic in the earth or sky,
Unless Lizette or Ninon be not far.
The bard who in all Nature nothing sees
Divine, unless a petticoat he ties
Amorously to the branches of the trees,
Or nightcap to the grass, is scarcely wise.
He has not heard the eternal's thundertone,
The voice of Nature in her various moods,
He cannot tread the dim ravines alone,
And of no woman dream 'mid whispering woods."

I expected some reproaches. Nothing of the sort. She murmured:

"How true it is!"

I remained stupefied. Had she understood?

Our boat was gradually drawing nearer to the bank, and got entangled under a willow which impeded its progress. I drew my arm around my com-

panion's waist, and very gently moved my lips toward her neck. But she repulsed me with an abrupt, angry movement:

"Have done, pray! You are rude!"

I tried to draw her toward me. She resisted, caught hold of the tree, and nearly upset us both into the water. I deemed it the prudent course to cease my importunities.

She said:

"I would rather have you capsized. I feel so happy. I want to dream—that is so nice." Then, in a slightly malicious tone, she added:

"Have you, then, already forgotten the verses you recited for me just now?"

She was right. I became silent.

She went on:

"Come! row!"

And I plied the oars once more. I began to find the night long and to see the absurdity of my conduct. My companion said to me:

"Will you make me a promise?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"To remain quiet, well-behaved, and discreet, if I permit you—"

"What? Say what you mean!"

"Here is what I mean! I want to lie down on my back in the bottom of the boat with you by my side. But I forbid you to touch me, to embrace me—in short to—to caress me."

I promised. She warned me:

"If you move, I'll capsize the boat."

And then we lay down side by side, our eyes turned toward the sky, while the boat glided slowly through

the water. We were rocked by the gentle movements of the shallop. The light sounds of the night came to us more distinctly in the bottom of the boat, sometimes causing us to start. And I felt springing up within me a strange, poignant emotion, an infinite tenderness, something like an irresistible impulse to open my arms in order to embrace, to open my heart in order to love, to give myself, to give my thoughts, my body, my life, my entire being to some one.

My companion murmured, like one in a dream:

"Where are we? Where are we going? It seems to me that I am quitting the earth. How sweet it is! Ah! if you loved me—a little!"

My heart began to throb. I had no answer to give. It seemed to me that I loved her. I had no longer any violent desire. I felt happy there by her side, and that was enough for me.

And thus we remained for a long, long time without stirring. We caught each other's hands; some delightful force rendered us motionless, an unknown force stronger than ourselves, an alliance, chaste, intimate, absolute, of our persons lying there side by side which belonged to without touching each other. What was this? How do I know? Love, perhaps.

Little by little, the dawn appeared. It was three o'clock in the morning. Slowly, a great brightness spread over the sky. The boat knocked against something. I rose up. We had come close to a tiny islet.

But I remained ravished, in a state of ecstasy. In front of us stretched the shining firmament, red, rosy, violet, spotted with fiery clouds resembling golden

vapors. The river was glowing with purple, and three houses on one side of it seemed to be burning.

I bent toward my companion. I was going to say: "Oh! look!" But I held my tongue, quite dazed, and I could no longer see anything except her. She, too, was rosy, with the rosy flesh tints with which must have mingled a little the hue of the sky. Her tresses were rosy; her eyes were rosy; her teeth were rosy; her dress, her laces, her smile, all were rosy. And in truth I believed, so overpowering was the illusion, that the aurora was there before me.

She rose softly to her feet, holding out her lips to me; and I moved toward her, trembling, delirious, feeling indeed that I was going to kiss Heaven, to kiss happiness, to kiss a dream which had become a woman, to kiss an ideal which had descended into human flesh.

She said to me: "You have a caterpillar in your hair." And suddenly I felt myself becoming as sad as if I had lost all hope in life.

That is all, Madame. It is puerile, silly, stupid. But I am sure that since that day it would be impossible for me to love. And yet—who can tell?

[The young man upon whom this letter was found was yesterday taken out of the Seine between Bougival and Marly. An obliging bargeman, who had searched the pockets in order to ascertain the name of the deceased, brought this paper to the author.]

THE LITTLE CASK



JULES CHICOT, the innkeeper, who lived at Épreville, pulled up his tilbury in front of Mother Magloire's farmhouse. He was a tall man of about forty, fat and with a red face and was generally said to be a very knowing customer.

He hitched his horse up to the gatepost and went in. He owned some land adjoining that of the old woman. He had been coveting her plot for a long while, and had tried in vain to buy it a score of times, but she had always obstinately refused to part with it.

"I was born here, and here I mean to die," was all she said.

He found her peeling potatoes outside the farmhouse door. She was a woman of about seventy-two, very thin, shriveled and wrinkled, almost dried-up, in fact, and much bent, but as active and untiring as a girl. Chicot patted her on the back in a very friendly fashion, and then sat down by her on a stool.

"Well, Mother, you are always pretty well and hearty, I am glad to see."

"Nothing to complain of, considering, thank you. And how are you, Monsieur Chicot?"

"Oh! pretty well, thank you, except a few rheumatic pains occasionally; otherwise, I should have nothing to complain of."

"That's all the better!"

And she said no more, while Chicot watched her going on with her work. Her crooked, knotty fingers, hard as a lobster's claws, seized the tubers, which were lying in a pail, as if they had been a pair of pincers, and peeled them rapidly, cutting off long strips of skin with an old knife which she held in the other hand, throwing the potatoes into the water as they were done. Three daring fowls jumped one after the other into her lap, seized a bit of peel, and then ran away as fast as their legs would carry them with it in their beaks.

Chicot seemed embarrassed, anxious, with something on the tip of his tongue which he could not get out. At last he said hurriedly:

"I say, Mother Magloire—"

"Well, what is it?"

"You are quite sure that you do not want to sell your farm?"

"Certainly not; you may make up your mind to that. What I have said, I have said, so don't refer to it again."

"Very well; only I fancy I have thought of an arrangement that might suit us both very well."

"What is it?"

"Here you are: You shall sell it to me, and

keep it all the same. You don't understand? Very well, so just follow me in what I am going to say."

The old woman left off peeling her potatoes, and looked at the innkeeper attentively from under her bushy eyebrows, and he went on:

"Let me explain myself: Every month I will give you a hundred and fifty francs.* You understand me, I suppose? Every month I will come and bring you thirty crowns,† and it will not make the slightest difference in your life—not the very slightest. You will have your own home just as you have now, will not trouble yourself about me, and will owe me nothing; all you will have to do will be to take my money. Will that arrangement suit you?"

He looked at her good-humoredly, one might almost have said benevolently, and the old woman returned his looks distrustfully, as if she suspected a trap, and said:

"It seems all right, as far as I am concerned, but it will not give you the farm."

"Never mind about that," he said, "**you** will remain here as long as it pleases God Almighty to let you live; it will be your home. Only **you** will sign a deed before a lawyer making it over to me after your death. You have no children, only nephews and nieces for whom you don't care a straw. Will that suit you? You will keep everything during your life, and I will give you the thirty crowns a month. It is pure gain as far as you are concerned."

* As near as possible \$30.

† The old name, still applied locally to a five-franc piece.

The old woman was surprised, rather uneasy, but, nevertheless, very much tempted to agree, and answered:

"I don't say that I will not agree to it, but I must think about it. Come back in a week and we will talk it over again, and I will then give you my definite answer."

And Chicot went off, as happy as a king who had conquered an empire.

Mother Magloire was thoughtful, and did not sleep at all that night; in fact, for four days she was in a fever of hesitation. She *smelled*, so to say, that there was something underneath the offer which was not to her advantage; but then the thought of thirty crowns a month, of all those coins chinking in her apron, falling to her, as it were, from the skies, without her doing anything for it, filled her with covetousness.

She went to the notary and told him about it. He advised her to accept Chicot's offer, but said she ought to ask for a monthly payment of fifty crowns instead of thirty, as her farm was worth sixty thousand francs* at the lowest calculation.

"If you live for fifteen years longer," he said, "even then he will only have paid forty-five thousand francs† for it."

The old woman trembled with joy at this prospect of getting fifty crowns a month; but she was still suspicious, fearing some trick, and she remained a long time with the lawyer asking questions without being able to make up her mind to go. At last she

* \$12000.

† \$9000.

gave him instructions to draw up the deed, and returned home with her head in a whirl, just as if she had drunk four jugs of new cider.

When Chicot came again to receive her answer she took a lot of persuading, and declared that she could not make up her mind to agree to his proposal, though she was all the time on tenter-hooks lest he should not consent to give the fifty crowns. At last, when he grew urgent, she told him what she expected for her farm.

He looked surprised and disappointed, and refused.

Then, in order to convince him, she began to talk about the probable duration of her life.

"I am certainly not likely to live for more than five or six years longer. I am nearly seventy-three, and far from strong, even considering my age. The other evening I thought I was going to die, and could hardly manage to crawl into bed."

But Chicot was not going to be taken in.

"Come, come, old lady, you are as strong as the church tower, and will live till you are a hundred at least; you will be sure to see me put underground first."

The whole day was spent in discussing the money, and as the old woman would not give way, the landlord consented to give the fifty crowns, and she insisted upon having ten crowns over and above to strike the bargain.

Three years passed by, and the old dame did not seem to have grown a day older. Chicot was in despair. It seemed to him as if he had been paying that annuity for fifty years, that he had been taken

in, outwitted, and ruined. From time to time he went to see his annuitant, just as one goes in July to see when the harvest is likely to begin. She always met him with a cunning look, and one would have felt inclined to think that she was congratulating herself on the trick she had played him. Seeing how well and hearty she seemed, he very soon got into his tilbury again, growling to himself:

“Will you never die, you old brute?”

He did not know what to do, and felt inclined to strangle her when he saw her. He hated her with a ferocious, cunning hatred, the hatred of a peasant who has been robbed, and began to cast about for means of getting rid of her.

One day he came to see her again, rubbing his hands like he did the first time when he proposed the bargain, and, after having chatted for a few minutes, he said:

“Why do you never come and have a bit of dinner at my place when you are in Épreville? The people are talking about it and saying that we are not on friendly terms, and that pains me. You know it will cost you nothing if you come, for I don’t look at the price of a dinner. Come whenever you feel inclined; I shall be very glad to see you.”

Old Mother Magloire did not need to be told twice, and the next day but one—she was going to the town in any case, it being market-day, in her gig, driven by her man—she, without any demur, put her trap up in Chicot’s stable, and went in search of her promised dinner.

The publican was delighted, and treated her like a princess, giving her roast fowl, black pudding, leg of

mutton, and bacon and cabbage. But she ate next to nothing. She had always been a small eater and had generally lived on a little soup and a crust of bread-and-butter.

Chicot was disappointed, and pressed her to eat more, but she refused. She would drink next to nothing either, and declined any coffee, so he asked her:

"But surely, you will take a little drop of brandy or liquor?"

"Well, as to that, I don't know that I will refuse." Whereupon he shouted out:

"Rosalie, bring the superfine brandy,—*the special*,—you know."

The servant appeared, carrying a long bottle ornamented with a paper vine-leaf, and he filled two liquor glasses.

"Just try that; you will find it first-rate."

The good woman drank it slowly in sips, so as to make the pleasure last all the longer, and when she had finished her glass, draining the last drops so as to make sure of all, she said:

"Yes, that is first-rate!"

Almost before she had said it, Chicot had poured her out another glassful. She wished to refuse, but it was too late, and she drank it very slowly, as she had done the first, and he asked her to have a third. She objected, but he persisted.

"It is as mild as milk, you know. I can drink ten or a dozen without any ill effect; it goes down like sugar, and leaves no headache behind; one would think that it evaporated on the tongue. It is the most wholesome thing you can drink."

She took it, for she really wished to have it, but she left half the glass.

Then Chicot, in an excess of generosity, said:

"Look here, as it is so much to your taste, I will give you a small keg of it, just to show that you and I are still excellent friends." Then she took her leave, feeling slightly overcome by the effects of what she had drunk.

The next day the innkeeper drove into her yard, and took a little iron-hooped keg out of his gig. He insisted on her tasting the contents, to make sure it was the same delicious article, and, when they had each of them drunk three more glasses, he said, as he was going away:

"Well, you know, when it is all gone, there is more left; don't be modest, for I shall not mind. The sooner it is finished the better pleased I shall be."

Four days later he came again. The old woman was outside her door cutting up the bread for her soup.

He went up to her, and put his face close to hers, so that he might smell her breath; and when he smelled the alcohol he felt pleased.

"I suppose you will give me a glass of *the special?*" he said. And they had three glasses each.

Soon, however, it began to be whispered abroad that Mother Magloire was in the habit of getting drunk all by herself. She was picked up in her kitchen, then in her yard, then in the roads in the neighborhood, and was often brought home like a log.

Chicot did not go near her any more, and, when people spoke to him about her, he used to say, putting on a distressed look:

"It is a great pity that she should have taken to drink at her age; but when people get old there is no remedy. It will be the death of her in the long run."

And it certainly was the death of her. She died the next winter. About Christmas time she fell down unconscious in the snow, and was found dead the next morning.

And when Chicot came in for the farm he said:

"It was very stupid of her; if she had not taken to drink she might very well have lived for ten years longer."

A FISHING EXCURSION



PARIS was blockaded, desolate, famished. The sparrows were few, and anything that was to be had was good to eat.

On a bright morning in January, Mr. Morissot, a watchmaker by trade, but idler through circumstances, was walking along the boulevard, sad, hungry, with his hands in the pockets of his uniform trousers, when he came face to face with a brother-in-arms whom he recognized as an old-time friend.

Before the war, Morissot could be seen at daybreak every Sunday, trudging along with a cane in one hand and a tin box on his back. He would take the train to Colombes and walk from there to the Isle of Marante where he would fish until dark.

It was there he had met Mr. Sauvage who kept a little notion store in the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, a jovial fellow and passionately fond of fishing like himself. A warm friendship had sprung up between these two and they would fish side by side all day,

very often without saying a word. Some days, when everything looked fresh and new and the beautiful spring sun gladdened every heart, Mr. Morissot would exclaim:

"How delightful!" and Mr. Sauvage would answer:

"There is nothing to equal it."

Then again on a fall evening, when the glorious setting sun, spreading its golden mantle on the already tinted leaves, would throw strange shadows around the two friends, Sauvage would say:

"What a grand picture!"

"It beats the boulevard!" would answer Morissot. But they understood each other quite as well without speaking.

The two friends had greeted each other warmly and had resumed their walk side by side, both thinking deeply of the past and present events. They entered a *café*, and when a glass of absinthe had been placed before each Sauvage sighed:

"What terrible events, my friend!"

"And what weather!" said Morissot sadly; "this is the first nice day we have had this year. Do you remember our fishing excursions?"

"Do I! Alas! when shall we go again!"

After a second absinthe they emerged from the *café*, feeling rather dizzy—that light-headed effect which alcohol has on an empty stomach. The balmy air had made Sauvage exuberant and he exclaimed:

"Suppose we go!"

"Where?"

"Fishing."

"Fishing! Where?"

"To our old spot, to Colombes. The French soldiers are stationed near there and I know Colonel Dumoulin will give us a pass."

"It's a go; I am with you."

An hour after, having supplied themselves with their fishing tackle, they arrived at the colonel's villa. He had smiled at their request and had given them a pass in due form.

At about eleven o'clock they reached the advance-guard, and after presenting their pass, walked through Colombes and found themselves very near their destination. Argenteuil, across the way, and the great plains toward Nanterre were all deserted. Solitary the hills of Orgemont and Sannois rose clearly above the plains; a splendid point of observation.

"See," said Sauvage pointing to the hills, "the Prussians are there."

Prussians! They had never seen one, but they knew that they were all around Paris, invisible and powerful; plundering, devastating, and slaughtering. To their superstitious terror they added a deep hatred for this unknown and victorious people.

"What if we should meet some?" said Morissot.

"We would ask them to join us," said Sauvage in true Parisian style.

Still they hesitated to advance. The silence frightened them. Finally Sauvage picked up courage.

"Come, let us go on cautiously."

They proceeded slowly, hiding behind bushes, looking anxiously on every side, listening to every sound. A bare strip of land had to be crossed before reaching the river. They started to run. At last,

they reached the bank and sank into the bushes; breathless, but relieved.

Morissot thought he heard some one walking. He listened attentively, but no, he heard no sound. They were indeed alone! The little island shielded them from view. The house where the restaurant used to be seemed deserted; feeling reassured, they settled themselves for a good day's sport.

Sauvage caught the first fish, Morissot the second; and every minute they would bring one out which they would place in a net at their feet. It was indeed miraculous! They felt that supreme joy which one feels after having been deprived for months of a pleasant pastime. They had forgotten everything; even the war!

Suddenly, they heard a rumbling sound and the earth shook beneath them. It was the cannon on Mont Valérien. Morissot looked up and saw a trail of smoke, which was instantly followed by another explosion. Then they followed in quick succession.

"They are at it again," said Sauvage shrugging his shoulders. Morissot, who was naturally peaceful, felt a sudden, uncontrollable anger.

"Stupid fools! What pleasure can they find in killing each other!"

"They are worse than brutes!"

"It will always be thus as long as we have governments."

"Well, such is life!"

"You mean death!" said Morissot laughing.

They continued to discuss the different political problems, while the cannon on Mont Valérien sent death and desolation among the French.

Suddenly they started. They had heard a step behind them. They turned and beheld four big men in dark uniforms, with guns pointed right at them. Their fishing-lines dropped out of their hands and floated away with the current.

In a few minutes, the Prussian soldiers had bound them, cast them into a boat, and rowed across the river to the island which our friends had thought deserted. They soon found out their mistake when they reached the house, behind which stood a score or more of soldiers. A big burly officer, seated astride a chair, smoking an immense pipe, addressed them in excellent French:

"Well, gentlemen, have you made a good haul?"

Just then, a soldier deposited at his feet the net full of fish which he had taken good care to take along with him. The officer smiled and said:

"I see you have done pretty well; but let us change the subject. You are evidently sent to spy upon me. You pretended to fish so as to put me off the scent, but I am not so simple. I have caught you and shall have you shot. I am sorry, but war is war. As you passed the advance-guard you certainly must have the password; give it to me, and I will set you free."

The two friends stood side by side, pale and slightly trembling, but they answered nothing.

"No one will ever know. You will go back home quietly and the secret will disappear with you. If you refuse, it is instant death! Choose!"

They remained motionless; silent. The Prussian officer calmly pointed to the river.

"In five minutes you will be at the bottom of this

river! Surely, you have a family, friends waiting for you?"

Still they kept silent. The cannon rumbled incessantly. The officer gave orders in his own tongue, then moved his chair away from the prisoners. A squad of men advanced within twenty feet of them, ready for command.

"I give you one minute; not a second more!"

Suddenly approaching the two Frenchmen, he took Morissot aside and whispered:

"Quick; the password. Your friend will not know; he will think I have changed my mind." Morissot said nothing.

Then taking Sauvage aside he asked him the same thing, but he also was silent. The officer gave further orders and the men leveled their guns. At that moment, Morissot's eyes rested on the net full of fish lying in the grass a few feet away. The sight made him feel faint and, though he struggled against it, his eyes filled with tears. Then turning to his friend:

"Farewell! Mr. Sauvage!"

"Farewell! Mr. Morissot."

They stood for a minute, hand in hand, trembling with emotion which they were unable to control.

"Fire!" commanded the officer.

The squad of men fired as one. Sauvage fell straight on his face. Morissot, who was taller, swayed, pivoted, and fell across his friend's body, his face to the sky; while blood flowed freely from the wound in his breast. The officer gave further orders and his men disappeared. They came back presently with ropes and stones, which they tied to the feet of the two friends, and four of them carried them to

the edge of the river. They swung them and threw them in as far as they could. The bodies weighted by stones sank immediately. A splash, a few ripples and the water resumed its usual calmness. The only thing to be seen was a little blood floating on the surface. The officer calmly retraced his steps toward the house muttering:

"The fish will get even now."

He perceived the net full of fish, picked it up, smiled, and called:

"Wilhelm!"

A soldier in a white apron approached. The officer handed him the fish saying:

"Fry these little things while they are still alive; They will make a delicious meal."

And having resumed his position on the chair, he puffed away at his pipe."

AFTER



"MY DARLINGS," said the Comtesse, "you must go to bed."

The three children, two girls and a boy, rose up to kiss their grandmother.

Then they said "Good night" to M. le Curé, who had dined at the château, as he did every Thursday.

The Abbé Mauduit sat two of the young ones on his knees, passing his long arms clad in black behind the children's necks; and, drawing their heads toward him with a paternal movement, he kissed each of them on the forehead with a long, tender kiss.

Then, he again set them down on the floor, and the little beings went off, the boy in front, and the girls behind.

"You are fond of children, M. le Curé," said the Comtesse.

"Very fond, Madame."

The old woman raised her bright eyes toward the priest.

"And—has your solitude never weighed too heavily on you?"

"Yes, sometimes."

He became silent, hesitated, and then added: "But I was never made for ordinary life."

"What do you know about it?"

"Oh! I know very well. I was made to be a priest; I followed my own path."

The Comtesse kept staring at him:

"Look here, M. le Curé, tell me this—tell me how it was you resolved to renounce forever what makes us love life—the rest of us—all that consoles and sustains us? What is it that drove you, impelled you, to separate yourself from the great natural path of marriage and the family. You are neither an enthusiast nor a fanatic, neither a gloomy person nor a sad person. Was it some strange occurrence, some sorrow, that led you to take lifelong vows?"

The Abbé Mauduit rose up and drew near to the fire, stretching out to the flames the big shoes that country priests generally wear. He seemed still hesitating as to what reply he should make.

He was a tall old man with white hair, and for the last twenty years had been the pastor of the parish of Sainte-Antoine-du-Rocher. The peasants said of him, "There's a good man for you!" And indeed he was a good man, benevolent, friendly to all, gentle, and, to crown all, generous. Like Saint Martin, he had cut his cloak in two. He freely laughed, and wept too, for very little, just like a woman,—a thing that prejudiced him more or less in the hard minds of the country people.

The old Comtesse de Saville, living in retirement in her château of Rocher, in order to bring up her grandchildren, after the successive deaths of her son and her

daughter-in-law, was very much attached to the curé, and used to say of him: "He has a kind heart!"

The abbé came every Thursday to spend the evening at the château, and they were close friends, with the open and honest friendship of old people.

She persisted:

"Look here M. le Curé! 'tis your turn now to make a confession!"

He repeated: "I was not made for a life like everybody else. I saw it myself, fortunately, in time, and have had many proofs since that I made no mistake on that point.

"My parents, who were mercers in Verdiers, and rather rich, had much ambition on my account. They sent me to a boarding-school while I was very young. You cannot conceive what a boy may suffer at college, by the mere fact of separation, of isolation. This monotonous life without affection is good for some and detestable for others. Young people often have hearts more sensitive than one supposes, and by shutting them up thus too soon, far from those they love, we may develop to an excessive extent a sensibility which is of an overstrung kind, and which becomes sickly and dangerous.

"I scarcely ever played; I never had companions; I passed my hours in looking back to my home with regret; I spent the whole night weeping in my bed. I sought to bring up before my mind recollections of my own home, trifling recollections of little things, little events. I thought incessantly of all I had left behind there. I became almost imperceptibly an over-sensitive youth, to whom the slightest annoyances were dreadful griefs.

"Together with this, I remained taciturn, self-absorbed, without expansion, without confidants. This work of mental exaltation was brought about obscurely but surely. The nerves of children are quickly excited; one ought to realize the fact that they live in a state of deep quiescence up to the time of almost complete development. But does anyone reflect that, for certain students, an unjust imposition can be as great a pang as the death of a friend afterward? Does anyone realize the fact that certain young souls have, with very little cause, terrible emotions, and are in a very short time diseased and incurable souls?

"This was my case. This faculty of regret developed itself in me in such a fashion that my existence became a martyrdom.

"I did not speak about it; I said nothing about it; but gradually I acquired a sensibility, or rather a sensitivity, so lively that my soul resembled a living wound. Everything that touched it produced in it twitchings of pain, frightful vibrations, and veritable ravages. Happy are the men whom nature has buttressed with indifference and cased in stoicism.

"I reached my sixteenth year. An excessive timidity had come to me from this aptitude to suffer on account of everything. Feeling myself unprotected against all the attacks of chance or fate, I feared every contact, every approach, every event. I lived on the watch as if under the constant threat of an unknown and always expected misfortune. I was afraid either to speak or to act publicly. I had, indeed, the sensation that life is a battle, a dreadful conflict in which one receives terrible blows, grievous, mortal wounds. In place of cherishing, like all men, the hope of good-

fortune on the morrow, I only kept a confused fear of it, and I felt in my own mind a desire to conceal myself—to avoid that combat in which I should be vanquished and slain.

“As soon as my studies were finished, they gave me six months’ time to choose a career. Suddenly a very simple event made me see clearly into myself, showed me the diseased condition of my mind, made me understand the danger, and caused me to make up my mind to fly from it.

“Verdiers is a little town surrounded with plains and woods. In the central street stands my parents’ house. I now passed my days far from this dwelling which I had so much regretted, so much desired. Dreams were awakened in me, and I walked all alone in the fields in order to let them escape and fly away. My father and my mother, quite occupied with business, and anxious about my future, talked to me only about their profits or about my possible plans. They were fond of me in the way that hard-headed, practical people are; they had more reason than heart in their affection for me. I lived imprisoned in my thoughts, and trembling with eternal uneasiness.

“Now, one evening, after a long walk, as I was making my way home with quick strides so as not to be late, I met a dog trotting toward me. He was a species of red spaniel, very lean, with long curly ears.

“When he was ten paces away from me, he stopped. I did the same. Then he began wagging his tail, and came over to me with short steps and nervous movements of his whole body, going down on his paws as if appealing to me, and softly shaking his head. He then made a show of crawling

with an air so humble, so sad, so suppliant, that I felt the tears coming into my eyes. I came near him; he ran away; then he came back again; and I bent down, trying to coax him to approach me with soft words. At last, he was within reach and I gently caressed him with the most careful hands.

"He grew bold, rose up bit by bit, laid his paws on my shoulders, and began to lick my face. He followed me into the house.

"This was really the first being I had passionately loved, because he returned my affection. My attachment to this animal was certainly exaggerated and ridiculous. It seemed to me in a confused sort of way that we were two brothers, lost on this earth, and therefore isolated and without defense, one as well as the other. He never again quitted my side. He slept at the foot of my bed, ate at the table in spite of the objections of my parents, and followed me in my solitary walks.

"I often stopped at the side of a ditch, and I sat down in the grass. Sam would lie on my knees, and lift up my hand with the end of his nose so that I might caress him.

"One day toward the end of June, as we were on the road from Saint-Pierre-de-Chavrol, I saw the diligence from Pavereau coming along. Its four horses were going at a gallop. It had a yellow box-seat, and imperial crowned with black leather. The coachman cracked his whip; a cloud of dust rose up under the wheels of the heavy vehicle, then floated behind, just as a cloud would do.

"And, all of a sudden, as the vehicle came close to me, Sam, perhaps frightened by the noise and wishing

to join me, jumped in front of it. A horse's foot knocked him down. I saw him rolling over, turning round, falling back again on all fours, and then the entire coach gave two big jolts and behind it I saw something quivering in the dust on the road. He was nearly cut in two; all his intestines were hanging through his stomach, which had been ripped open, and spurts of blood fell to the ground. He tried to get up, to walk, but he could only move his two front paws, and scratch the ground with them, as if to make a hole. The two others were already dead. And he howled dreadfully, mad with pain.

"He died in a few minutes. I cannot describe how much I felt and suffered. I was confined to my own room for a month.

"Now, one night, my father, enraged at seeing me in such a state for so little, exclaimed:

"How then will it be when you have real griefs, if you lose your wife or children?"

"And I began to see clearly into myself. I understood why all the small miseries of each day assumed in my eyes the importance of a catastrophe; I saw that I was organized in such a way that I suffered dreadfully from everything, that every painful impression was multiplied by my diseased sensibility, and an atrocious fear of life took possession of me. I was without passions, without ambitions; I resolved to sacrifice possible joys in order to avoid sure sorrows. Existence is short, but I made up my mind to spend it in the service of others, in relieving their troubles and enjoying their happiness. By having no direct experience of either one or the other, I would only be conscious of passionless emotions.

"And if you only knew how, in spite of this, misery tortures me, ravages me. But what would be for me an intolerable affliction has become commiseration, pity.

"The sorrows which I have every day to concern myself about I could not endure if they fell on my own heart. I could not have seen one of my children die without dying myself. And I have, in spite of everything, preserved such a deep and penetrating fear of circumstances that the sight of the postman entering my house makes a shiver pass every day through my veins, and yet I have nothing to be afraid of now."

The Abbé Mauduit ceased speaking. He stared into the fire in the huge grate, as if he saw there mysterious things, all the unknown portion of existence which he would have been able to live if he had been more fearless in the face of suffering.

He added, then, in a subdued tone:

"I was right. I was not made for this world."

The Comtesse said nothing at first; but at length, after a long silence, she remarked:

"For my part, if I had not my grandchildren, I believe I would not have the courage to live."

And the Curé rose up without saying another word.

As the servants were asleep in the kitchen, she conducted him herself to the door which looked out on the garden, and she saw his tall shadow, revealed by the reflection of the lamp, disappearing through the gloom of night.

Then she came back, sat down before the fire, and pondered over many things on which we never think when we are young.

THE SPASM



THE hotel-guests slowly entered the dining-room, and sat down in their places. The waiters began to attend on them in a leisurely fashion so as to enable those who were late to arrive, and to avoid bringing back the dishes. The old bathers, the *habitués*, those whose season was advancing, gazed with interest toward the door, whenever it opened, with a desire to see new faces appearing.

This is the principal distraction of health-resorts. People look forward to the dinner hour in order to inspect each day's new arrivals, to find out who they are, what they do, and what they think. A vague longing springs up in the mind, a longing for agreeable meetings, for pleasant acquaintances, perhaps for love-adventures. In this life of elbowings, strangers, as well as those with whom we have come into daily contact, assume an extreme importance. Curiosity is aroused, sympathy is ready to exhibit itself, and sociability is the order of the day.

We cherish antipathies for a week and friendships for a month; we see other people with different eyes, when we view them through the medium of the acquaintanceship that is brought about at health-resorts. We discover in men suddenly, after an hour's chat in the evening after dinner, or under the trees in the park where the generous spring bubbles up, a high intelligence and astonishing merits, and, a month afterward, we have completely forgotten these new friends, so fascinating when we first met them.

There also are formed lasting and serious ties more quickly than anywhere else. People see each other every day; they become acquainted very quickly; and with the affection thus originated is mingled something of the sweetness and self-abandonment of long-standing intimacies. We cherish in after years the dear and tender memories of those first hours of friendship, the memory of those first conversations through which we have been able to unveil a soul, of those first glances which interrogate and respond to the questions and secret thoughts which the mouth has not as yet uttered, the memory of that first cordial confidence, the memory of that delightful sensation of opening our hearts to those who are willing to open theirs to us.

And the melancholy of health-resorts, the monotony of days that are alike, help from hour to hour in this rapid development of affection.

* * * * *

Well, this evening, as on every other evening, we awaited the appearance of strange faces.

Only two appeared, but they were very remarkable looking, a man and a woman—father and daughter.

They immediately produced the same effect on my mind as some of Edgar Poe's characters; and yet there was about them a charm, the charm associated with misfortune. I looked upon them as the victims of fatality. The man was very tall and thin, rather stooping, with hair perfectly white, too white for his comparatively youthful physiognomy; and there was in his bearing and in his person that austerity peculiar to Protestants. The daughter, who was probably twenty-four or twenty-five, was small in stature, and was also very thin, very pale, and had the air of one worn out with utter lassitude. We meet people like this from time to time, people who seem too weak for the tasks and the needs of daily life, too weak to move about, to walk, to do all that we do every day. This young girl was very pretty, with the diaphanous beauty of a phantom; and she ate with extreme slowness, as if she were almost incapable of moving her arms. It must have been she assuredly who had come to take the waters.

They found themselves facing me at the opposite side of the table; and I at once noticed that the father had a very singular nervous spasm. Every time he wanted to reach an object, his hand made a hook-like movement, a sort of irregular zigzag, before it succeeded in touching what it was in search of; and, after a little while, this action was so wearisome to me that I turned aside my head in order not to see it. I noticed, too, that the young girl, during meals, wore a glove on her left hand.

After dinner, I went for a stroll in the park of the thermal establishment. This led toward the little Auvergnese station of Châtel Guyon, hidden in a gorge

at the foot of the high mountain, of that mountain from which flow so many boiling springs, rising from the deep bed of extinct volcanoes. Over there, above us, the domes, which had once been craters, raised their mutilated heads on the summit of the long chain. For Châtel Guyon is situated at the spot where the region of domes begins. Beyond it stretches out the region of peaks, and, further on again, the region of precipices.

The Puy de Dôme is the highest of the domes, the Peak of Sancy is the loftiest of the peaks, and Cantal is the most precipitous of these mountain heights.

This evening, it was very warm. I walked up and down a shady path, on the side of the mountain overlooking the park, listening to the opening strains of the Casino band. I saw the father and the daughter advancing slowly in my direction. I saluted them, as we are accustomed to salute our hotel-companions at health-resorts; and the man, coming to a sudden halt, said to me:

"Could you not, Monsieur, point out to us a short walk, nice and easy, if that is possible, and excuse my intrusion on you?"

I offered to show them the way toward the valley through which the little river flowed, a deep valley forming a gorge between two tall, craggy, wooded slopes. They gladly accepted my offer, and we talked naturally about the virtues of the waters.

"Oh!" he said, "my daughter has a strange malady, the seat of which is unknown. She suffers from incomprehensible nervous disorders. At one time, the doctors think she has an attack of heart disease. at

another time, they imagine it is some affection of the liver, and at another time they declare it to be a disease of the spine. To-day, her condition is attributed to the stomach, which is the great caldron and regulator of the body, the Protean source of diseases with a thousand forms and a thousand susceptibilities to attack. This is why we have come here. For my part, I am rather inclined to think it is the nerves. In any case it is very sad."

Immediately the remembrance of the violent spasmodic movement of his hand came back to my mind, and I asked him:

"But is this not the result of heredity? Are not your own nerves somewhat affected?"

He replied calmly:

"Mine? Oh! no—my nerves have always been very steady."

Then suddenly, after a pause, he went on:

"Ah! You were alluding to the spasm in my hand every time I want to reach for anything? This arises from a terrible experience which I had. Just imagine! this daughter of mine was actually buried alive!"

I could only give utterance to the word "Ah!" so great were my astonishment and emotion.

* * * * *

He continued.

"Here is the story. It is simple. Juliette had been subject for some time to serious attacks of the heart. We believed that she had disease of that organ and we were prepared for the worst.

"One day, she was carried into the house cold, lifeless, dead. She had fallen down unconscious in

the garden. The doctor certified that life was extinct. I watched by her side for a day and two nights. I laid her with my own hands in the coffin, which I accompanied to the cemetery where she was deposited in the family vault. It is situated in the very heart of Lorraine.

"I wished to have her interred with her jewels, bracelets, necklaces, rings, all presents which she had got from me, and with her first ball-dress on.

"You may easily imagine the state of mind in which I was when I returned home. She was the only companion I had, for my wife has been dead for many years. I found my way to my own apartment in a half-distracted condition, utterly exhausted, and I sank into my easy-chair, without the capacity to think or the strength to move. I was nothing better now than a suffering, vibrating machine, a human being who had, as it were, been flayed alive; my soul was like a living wound.

"My old valet, Prosper, who had assisted me in placing Juliette in her coffin, and preparing her for her last sleep, entered the room noiselessly, and asked:

"Does Monsieur want anything?"

"I merely shook my head, by way of answering 'No.'

"He urged: 'Monsieur is wrong. He will bring some illness on himself. Would Monsieur like me to put him to bed?'

"I answered: 'No! let me alone!' And he left the room.

"I know not how many hours slipped away. Oh! what a night, what a night! It was cold. My fire

had died out in the huge grate; and the wind, the winter wind, an icy wind, a hurricane accompanied by frost and snow, kept blowing against the window with a sinister and regular noise.

"How many hours slipped away? There I was without sleeping, powerless, crushed, my eyes wide open, my legs stretched out, my body limp, inanimate, and my mind torpid with despair. Suddenly, the great bell of the entrance gate, the bell of the vestibule, rang out.

"I got such a shock that my chair cracked under me. The solemn ponderous sound vibrated through the empty château as if through a vault. I turned round to see what the hour was by my clock. It was just two in the morning. Who could be coming at such an hour?

"And abruptly the bell again rang twice. The servants, without doubt, were afraid to get up. I took a wax-candle and descended the stairs. I was on the point of asking: 'Who is there?'

"Then, I felt ashamed of my weakness, and I slowly opened the huge door. My heart was throbbing wildly; I was frightened; I hurriedly drew back the door, and in the darkness, I distinguished a white figure standing erect, something that resembled an apparition.

"I recoiled, petrified with horror, faltering:

"'Who—who—who are you?'

"A voice replied:

"'It is I, father.'

"It was my daughter. I really thought I must be mad, and I retreated backward before this advancing specter. I kept moving away, making a sign with

my hand, as if to drive the phantom away, that gesture which you have noticed,—that gesture of which since then I have never got rid.

“The apparition spoke again:

“‘Do not be afraid, papa; I was not dead. Somebody tried to steal my rings, and cut one of my fingers, the blood began to flow, and this reanimated me.’

“And, in fact, I could see that her hand was covered with blood.

“I fell on my knees, choking with sobs and with a rattling in my throat.

“Then, when I had somewhat collected my thoughts, though I was still so much dismayed that I scarcely realized the gruesome good-fortune that had fallen to my lot, I made her go up to my room, and sit down in my easy-chair; then I rang excitedly for Prosper to get him to light up the fire again and to get her some wine and summon the rest of the servants to her assistance.

“The man entered, stared at my daughter, opened his mouth with a gasp of alarm and stupefaction, and then fell back, insensible.

“It was he who had opened the vault, and who had mutilated and then abandoned my daughter, for he could not efface the traces of the theft. He had not even taken the trouble to put back the coffin into its place, feeling sure, besides, that he would not be suspected by me, as I completely trusted him.

“You see, Monsieur, that we are very unhappy people.”

* * * * *

He stopped.

The night had fallen, casting its shadows over the desolate, mournful vale, and a sort of mysterious fear possessed me at finding myself by the side of those strange beings, of this young girl who had come back from the tomb and this father with his uncanny spasm.

I found it impossible to make any comment on this dreadful story. I only murmured:

“What a horrible thing!”

Then, after a minute's silence, I added:

“Suppose we go back, I think it is getting cold.”
And we made our way back to the hotel.

MY UNCLE SOSTHENES



MY UNCLE SOSTHENES was a Free-thinker, like many others are, from pure stupidity; people are very often religious in the same way. The mere sight of a priest threw him into a violent rage; he would shake his fist and grimace at him, and touch a piece of iron when the priest's back was turned, forgetting that the latter action showed a belief after all, the belief in the evil eye.

Now when beliefs are unreasonable one should have all or none at all. I myself am a Freethinker; I revolt at all the dogmas which have invented the fear of death, but I feel no anger toward places of worship, be they Catholic Apostolic, Roman, Protestant, Greek, Russian, Buddhist, Jewish, or Mohammedan. I have a peculiar manner of looking at them and explaining them. A place of worship represents the homage paid by man to "The Unknown." The more extended our thoughts and our views become, the more The Unknown diminishes, and the more places of worship will decay. I, how-

ever, in the place of church furniture, in the place of pulpits, reading desks, altars, and so on, would fit them up with telescopes, microscopes, and electrical machines; that is all.

My uncle and I differed on nearly every point. He was a patriot, while I was not—for after all patriotism is a kind of religion; it is the egg from which wars are hatched.

My uncle was a Freemason, and I used to declare that they are stupider than old women devotees. That is my opinion, and I maintain it; if we must have any religion at all the old one is good enough for me.

What is their object? Mutual help to be obtained by tickling the palms of each other's hands. I see no harm in it, for they put into practice the Christian precept: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." The only difference consists in the tickling, but it does not seem worth while to make such a fuss about lending a poor devil half-a-crown.

To all my arguments my uncle's reply used to be:

"We are raising up a religion against a religion; Freethought will kill clericalism. Freemasonry is the headquarters of those who are demolishing all deities."

"Very well, my dear uncle," I would reply (in my heart I felt inclined to say, "You old idiot!"); "it is just that which I am blaming you for. Instead of destroying, you are organizing competition; it is only a case of lowering the prices. And then, if you only admitted Freethinkers among you I could understand it, but you admit anybody. You have a number of Catholics among you, even the leaders of the

party. Pius IX. is said to have been one of you before he became Pope. If you call a society with such an organization a bulwark against clericalism, I think it is an extremely weak one."

"My dear boy," my uncle would reply, with a wink, "our most formidable actions are political; slowly and surely we are everywhere undermining the monarchical spirit."

Then I broke out: "Yes, you are very clever! If you tell me that Freemasonry is an election-machine, I will grant it you. I will never deny that it is used as a machine to control candidates of all shades; if you say that it is only used to hoodwink people, to drill them to go to the voting-urn as soldiers are sent under fire, I agree with you; if you declare that it is indispensable to all political ambitions because it changes all its members into electoral agents, I should say to you, 'That is as clear as the sun.' But when you tell me that it serves to undermine the monarchical spirit, I can only laugh in your face."

"Just consider that vast and democratic association which had Prince Napoleon for its Grand Master under the Empire; which has the Crown Prince for its Grand Master in Germany, the Czar's brother in Russia, and to which the Prince of Wales and King Humbert and nearly all the royalists of the globe belong."

"You are quite right," my uncle said; "but all these persons are serving our projects without guessing it."

I felt inclined to tell him he was talking a pack of nonsense.

It was, however, indeed a sight to see my uncle when he had a Freemason to dinner.

On meeting they shook hands in a manner that was irresistibly funny; one could see that they were going through a series of secret mysterious pressures. When I wished to put my uncle in a rage, I had only to tell him that dogs also have a manner which savors very much of Freemasonry, when they greet one another on meeting.

Then my uncle would take his friend into a corner to tell him something important, and at dinner they had a peculiar way of looking at each other, and of drinking to each other, in a manner as if to say: "We know all about it, don't we?"

And to think that there are millions on the face of the globe who are amused at such monkey tricks! I would sooner be a Jesuit.

Now in our town there really was an old Jesuit who was my uncle's detestation. Every time he met him, or if he only saw him at a distance, he used to say: "Go on, you toad!" And then, taking my arm, he would whisper to me:

"Look here, that fellow will play me a trick some day or other, I feel sure of it."

My uncle spoke quite truly, and this was how it happened, through my fault also.

It was close on Holy Week, and my uncle made up his mind to give a dinner on Good Friday, a real dinner with his favorite chitterlings and black puddings. I resisted as much as I could, and said:

"I shall eat meat on that day, but at home, quite by myself. Your *manifestation*, as you call it, is an idiotic idea. Why should you manifest? What does it matter to you if people do not eat any meat?"

But my uncle would not be persuaded. He asked three of his friends to dine with him at one of the best restaurants in the town, and as he was going to pay the bill, I had certainly, after all, no scruples about *manifesting*.

At four o'clock we took a conspicuous place in the most frequented restaurant in the town, and my uncle ordered dinner in a loud voice, for six o'clock.

We sat down punctually, and at ten o'clock we had not finished. Five of us had drunk eighteen bottles of fine still wines, and four of champagne. Then my uncle proposed what he was in the habit of calling: "The archbishop's feat." Each man put six small glasses in front of him, each of them filled with a different liqueur, and then they had all to be emptied at one gulp, one after another, while one of the waiters counted twenty. It was very stupid, but my uncle thought it was very suitable to the occasion.

At eleven o'clock he was dead drunk. So we had to take him home in a cab and put him to bed, and one could easily foresee that his anti-clerical demonstration would end in a terrible fit of indigestion.

As I was going back to my lodgings, being rather drunk myself, with a cheerful Machiavelian drunkenness which quite satisfied all my instincts of scepticism, an idea struck me.

I arranged my necktie, put on a look of great distress, and went and rang loudly at the old Jesuit's door. As he was deaf he made me wait a longish while, but at length he appeared at his window in a cotton nightcap and asked what I wanted.

I shouted out at the top of my voice:

"Make haste, reverend Sir, and open the door; a poor, despairing, sick man is in need of your spiritual ministrations."

The good, kind man put on his trousers as quickly as he could and came down without his cassock. I told him in a breathless voice that my uncle, the Free-thinker, had been taken suddenly ill. Fearing it was going to be something serious he had been seized with a sudden fear of death, and wished to see a priest and talk to him; to have his advice and comfort, to make up with the Church, and to confess, so as to be able to cross the dreaded threshold at peace with himself; and I added in a mocking tone:

"At any rate, he wishes it, and if it does him no good it can do him no harm."

The old Jesuit, who was startled, delighted, and almost trembling, said to me:

"Wait a moment, my son, I will come with you."

But I replied: "Pardon me, reverend Father, if I do not go with you; but my convictions will not allow me to do so. I even refused to come and fetch you, so I beg you not to say that you have seen me, but to declare that you had a presentiment—a sort of revelation of his illness."

The priest consented, and went off quickly, knocked at my uncle's door, was soon let in, and I saw the black cassock disappear within that stronghold of Freethought.

I hid under a neighboring gateway to wait for events. Had he been well, my uncle would have half murdered the Jesuit, but I knew that he would

scarcely be able to move an arm, and I asked myself, gleefully, what sort of a scene would take place between these antagonists—what explanation would be given, and what would be the issue of this situation, which my uncle's indignation would render more tragic still?

I laughed till I had to hold my sides, and said to myself, half aloud: "Oh! what a joke, what a joke!"

Meanwhile it was getting very cold. I noticed that the Jesuit stayed a long time, and thought: "They are having an explanation, I suppose."

One, two, three hours passed, and still the reverend Father did not come out. What had happened? Had my uncle died in a fit when he saw him, or had he killed the cassocked gentleman? Perhaps they had mutually devoured each other? This last supposition appeared very unlikely, for I fancied that my uncle was quite incapable of swallowing a grain more nourishment at that moment.

At last the day broke. I was very uneasy, and, not venturing to go into the house myself, I went to one of my friends who lived opposite. I roused him, explained matters to him, much to his amusement and astonishment, and took possession of his window.

At nine o'clock he relieved me and I got a little sleep. At two o'clock I, in my turn, replaced him. We were utterly astonished.

At six o'clock the Jesuit left, with a very happy and satisfied look on his face, and we saw him go away with a quiet step.

Then, timid and ashamed, I went and knocked at my uncle's door. When the servant opened it I did

not dare to ask her any questions, but went upstairs without saying a word.

My uncle was lying pale, exhausted, with weary, sorrowful eyes and heavy arms, on his bed. A little religious picture was fastened to one of the bed-curtains with a pin.

"Why, uncle," I said, "you in bed still? Are you not well?"

He replied in a feeble voice:

"Oh! my dear boy, I have been very ill; nearly dead."

"How was that, uncle?"

"I don't know; it was most surprising. But what is stranger still is, that the Jesuit priest who has just left—you know, that excellent man whom I have made such fun of—had a divine revelation of my state, and came to see me."

I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, and with difficulty said: "Oh, really!"

"Yes, he came. He heard a Voice telling him to get up and come to me, because I was going to die. It was a revelation."

I pretended to sneeze, so as not to burst out laughing; I felt inclined to roll on the ground with amusement.

In about a minute I managed to say, indignantly: "And you received him, uncle, you? You, a Free-thinker, a Freemason? You did not have him thrown out-of-doors?"

He seemed confused, and stammered:

"Listen a moment, it is so astonishing—so astonishing and providential! He also spoke to me about my father; it seems he knew him formerly."

"Your father, uncle? But that is no reason for receiving a Jesuit."

"I know that, but I was very ill, and he looked after me most devotedly all night long. He was perfect; no doubt he saved my life; those men are all more or less doctors."

"Oh! he looked after you all night? But you said just now that he had only been gone a very short time."

"That is quite true; I kept him to breakfast after all his kindness. He had it at a table by my bedside while I drank a cup of tea."

"And he ate meat?"

My uncle looked vexed, as if I had said something very much out of place, and then added:

"Don't joke, Gaston; such things are out of place at times. He has shown me more devotion than many a relation would have done and I expect to have his convictions respected."

This rather upset me, but I answered, nevertheless: "Very well, uncle; and what did you do after breakfast?"

"We played a game of *bélique*, and then he repeated his breviary while I read a little book which he happened to have in his pocket, and which was not by any means badly written."

"A religious book, uncle?"

"Yes, and no, or rather—no. It is the history of their missions in Central Africa, and is rather a book of travels and adventures. What these men have done is very grand."

I began to feel that matters were going badly, so I got up. "Well, good-bye, uncle," I said, "I see

you are going to leave Freemasonry for religion; you are a renegade."

He was still rather confused, and stammered:

"Well, but religion is a sort of Freemasonry."

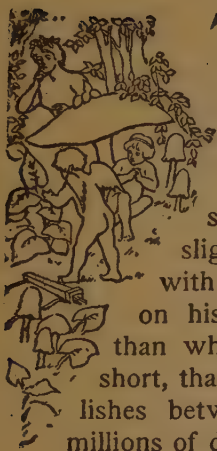
"When is your Jesuit coming back?" I asked.

"I don't—I don't know exactly; to-morrow, perhaps; but it is not certain."

I went out, altogether overwhelmed.

My joke turned out very badly for me! My uncle became radically converted, and if that had been all I should not have cared so much. Clerical or Freemason, to me it is all the same; six of one and half-a-dozen of the other; but the worst of it is that he has just made his will—yes, made his will—and has disinherited me in favor of that rascally Jesuit!

ALL OVER



THE Comte de Lormerin had just finished dressing himself. He cast a parting glance at the large glass, which occupied an entire panel of his dressing-room, and smiled.

He was really a fine-looking man still, though he was quite gray. Tall, slight, elegant, with no projecting paunch, with a scanty mustache of doubtful shade on his thin face which seemed fair rather than white, he had presence, that "chic," in short, that indescribable something which establishes between two men more difference than millions of dollars.

He murmured: "Lormerin is still alive!"

And he made his way into the drawing-room, where his correspondence awaited him.

On his table, where everything had its place, the work-table of the gentleman who never works, there were a dozen letters lying beside three newspapers of different opinions. With a single touch of the finger he exposed to view all these letters, like a

gambler giving the choice of a card; and he scanned the handwriting—a thing he did each morning before tearing open the envelopes.

It was for him a moment of delightful expectancy, of inquiry, and vague anxiety. What did these sealed mysterious papers bring him? What did they contain of pleasure, of happiness, or of grief? He surveyed them with a rapid sweep of the eye, recognizing in each case the hand that wrote them, selecting them, making two or three lots, according to what he expected from them. Here, friends; there, persons to whom he was indifferent; further on, strangers. The last kind always gave him a little uneasiness. What did they want from him? What hand had traced those curious characters full of thoughts, promises, or threats?

This day, one letter in particular caught his eye. It was simple nevertheless, without seeming to reveal anything; but he regarded it with disquietude, with a sort of internal shiver.

He thought: "From whom can it be? I certainly know this writing, and yet I can't identify it."

He raised it to a level with his face, holding it delicately between two fingers, striving to read through the envelope without making up his mind to open it.

Then he smelled it, and snatched up from the table a little magnifying glass which he used in studying all the niceties of handwriting. He suddenly felt unnerved. "Whom is it from? This hand is familiar to me, very familiar. I must have often read its prosings, yes, very often. But this must have been a long, long time ago. Who the deuce can it

be from? Pooh! 'tis only from somebody asking for money."

And he tore open the letter. Then he read:

"MY DEAR FRIEND: You have, without doubt, forgotten me, for it is now twenty-five years since we saw each other. I was young; I am old. When I bade you farewell, I quitted Paris in order to follow into the provinces my husband, my old husband, whom you used to call 'my hospital.' Do you remember him? He died five years ago; and now I am returning to Paris to get my daughter married, for I have a daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen, whom you have never seen. I informed you about her entrance into the world, but you certainly did not pay much attention to so trifling an event.

"You, you are always the handsome Lormerin; so I have been told. Well, if you still recollect little Lise, whom you used to call 'Lison,' come and dine this evening with her, with the elderly Baronne de Vance, your ever faithful friend, who, with some emotion, stretches out to you, without complaining at her lot, a devoted hand, which you must clasp but no longer kiss, my poor 'Jaquelet.'

"LISE DE VANCE."

Lormerin's heart began to throb. He remained sunk in his armchair, with the letter on his knees, staring straight before him, overcome by poignant feelings that made the tears mount up to his eyes!

If he had ever loved a woman in his life, it was this one, little Lise, Lise de Vance, whom he called "Cinder-Flower" on account of the strange color of her hair, and the pale gray of her eyes. Oh! what a fine, pretty, charming creature she was, this frail Baronne, the wife of that old, gouty, pimply Baron, who had abruptly carried her off to the provinces, shut her up, kept her apart through jealousy, through jealousy of the handsome Lormerin.

Yes, he had loved her, and he believed that he, too, had been truly loved. She gave him the name

of Jaquelet, and used to pronounce the word in an exquisite fashion.

A thousand memories that had been effaced came back to him, far off and sweet and melancholy now. One evening, she called on him on her way home from a ball, and they went out for a stroll in the Bois de Boulogne, she in evening dress, he in his dressing-jacket. It was springtime; the weather was beautiful. The odor of her bodice embalmed the warm air,—the odor of her bodice, and also a little, the odor of her skin. What a divine night! When they reached the lake, as the moon's rays fell across the branches into the water, she began to weep. A little surprised, he asked her why.

She replied.

"I don't know. 'Tis the moon and the water that have affected me. Every time I see poetic things, they seize hold of my heart and I have to cry."

He smiled, moved himself, considering her feminine emotion charming—the emotion of a poor little woman whom every sensation overwhelms. And he embraced her passionately, stammering:

"My little Lise, you are exquisite."

What a charming love affair, short-lived and dainty it had been, and all over too so quickly, cut short in the midst of its ardor by this old brute of a Baron, who had carried off his wife, and never shown her afterward to anyone!

Lormerin had forgotten, in good sooth, at the end of two or three months. One woman drives out the other so quickly in Paris, when one is a bachelor! No matter! he had kept a little chapel for her in his

heart, for he had loved her alone! He assured himself now that this was so.

He rose up, and said aloud: "Certainly, I will go and dine with her this evening!"

And instinctively he turned round toward the glass in order to inspect himself from head to foot. He reflected: "She must have grown old unpleasantly, more than I have!" And he felt gratified at the thought of showing himself to her still handsome, still fresh, of astonishing her, perhaps of filling her with emotion, and making her regret those by-gone days so far, far distant!

He turned his attention to the other letters. They were not of importance.

The whole day, he kept thinking of this phantom. What was she like now? How funny it was to meet in this way after twenty-five years! Would he alone recognize her?

He made his toilette with feminine coquetry, put on a white waistcoat, which suited him better, with the coat, sent for the hairdresser to give him a finishing touch with the curling-iron, for he had preserved his hair, and started very early in order to show his eagerness to see her.

The first thing he saw on entering a pretty drawing-room, freshly furnished, was his own portrait, an old, faded photograph, dating from the days of his good-fortune, hanging on the wall in an antique silk frame.

He sat down, and waited. A door opened behind him. He rose up abruptly, and, turning round, beheld an old woman with white hair who extended both hands toward him.

He seized them, kissed them one after the other with long, long kisses, then, lifting up his head, he gazed at the woman he had loved.

Yes, it was an old lady, an old lady whom he did not recognize, and who, while she smiled, seemed ready to weep.

He could not abstain from murmuring:

"It is you, Lise?"

She replied:

"Yes, it is I; it is I, indeed. You would not have known me, isn't that so? I have had so much sorrow—so much sorrow. Sorrow has consumed my life. Look at me now—or rather don't look at me! But how handsome you have kept—and young! If I had by chance met you in the street, I would have cried, 'Jaquet!' Now sit down and let us, first of all, have a chat. And then I'll show you my daughter, my grown-up daughter. You'll see how she resembles me—or rather how I resembled her—no, it is not quite that: she is just like the 'me' of former days—you shall see! But I wanted to be alone with you first. I feared that there would be some emotion on my side, at the first moment. Now it is all over—it is past. Pray be seated, my friend."

He sat down beside her, holding her hand; but he did not know what to say; he did not know this woman—it seemed to him that he had never seen her before. What had he come to do in this house? Of what could he speak? Of the long ago? What was there in common between him and her? He could no longer recall anything to mind in the presence of this grandmotherly face. He could no longer

recall to mind all the nice, tender things so sweet, so bitter, that had assailed his heart, some time since, when he thought of the other, of little Lise, of the dainty Cinder-Flower. What then had become of her, the former one, the one he had loved—that woman of far-off dreams, the blonde with gray eyes, the young one who used to call him Jaquelet so prettily?

They remained side by side, motionless, both constrained, troubled, profoundly ill at ease.

As they only talked in commonplace phrases, broken and slow, she rose up and pressed the button of the bell.

“I am going to call Renée,” she said.

There was a tap at the door, then the rustle of a dress; next, a young voice exclaimed:

“Here I am, mamma!”

Lormerin remained scared, as if at the sight of an apparition.

He stammered

“Good day, Mademoiselle.”

Then, turning toward the mother:

“Oh! it is you!”

In fact, it was she, she whom he had known in bygone days, the Lise who had vanished and came back! In her he found the woman he had won twenty-five years before. This one was even younger still, fresher, more childlike.

He felt a wild desire to open his arms, to clasp her to his heart again, murmuring in her ear:

“Good day, Lison!”

A man-servant announced: “Dinner is ready, Madame.” And they proceeded toward the dining-room.

What passed at this dinner? What did they say to him, and what could he say in reply? He found himself plunged in one of those strange dreams which border on insanity. He gazed at the two women with a fixed idea in his mind, a morbid, self-contradictory idea: "Which is the real one?"

The mother smiled, repeating over and over again: "Do you remember?" And it was in the bright eye of the young girl that he found again his memories of the past. Twenty times, he opened his mouth to say to her: "Do you remember, Lison?—" forgetting this white-haired lady who was regarding him with looks of tenderness.

And yet there were moments when he no longer felt sure, when he lost his head. He could see that the woman of to-day was not exactly the woman of long ago. The other one, the former one, had in her voice, in her glance, in her entire being something which he did not find again in the mother. And he made efforts to recall his ladylove, to seize again what had escaped from her, what this resuscitated one did not possess.

The Baronne said:

"You have lost your old sprightliness, my poor friend."

He murmured: "There are many other things that I have lost!"

But in his heart, touched with emotion, he felt his old love springing to life once more like an awakened wild beast ready to bite him.

The young girl went on chattering, and every now and then some familiar phrase of her mother which she had borrowed, a certain style of speaking and

thinking, that resemblance of mind and manner which people acquire by living together, shook Lormerin from head to foot. All these things penetrated him, making the reopened wound of his passion bleed anew.

He got away early, and took a turn along the boulevard. But the image of this young girl pursued him, haunted him, quickened his heart, inflamed his blood. Instead of two women, he now saw only one, a young one, the one of former days returned, and he loved her as he had loved her prototype in bygone years. He loved her with greater ardor, after an interval of twenty-five years.

He went home to reflect on this strange and terrible thing, and to think on what he should do.

But as he was passing, with a wax-candle in his hand before the glass, the large glass in which he had contemplated himself and admired himself before he started, he saw reflected there an elderly, gray-haired man; and suddenly he recollected what he had been in olden days, in the days of little Lise. He saw himself charming and handsome, as he had been when he was loved! Then, drawing the light nearer, he looked at himself more closely, as one inspects a strange thing with a magnifying glass, tracing the wrinkles, discovering those frightful ravages which he had not perceived till now.

And he sat down, crushed at the sight of himself, at the sight of his lamentable image, murmuring:

“All over, Lormerin!”

THE HORRIBLE



THE shadows of a balmy night were slowly falling. The women remained in the drawing-room of the villa.

The men, seated or astride on garden-chairs, were smoking in front of the door, forming a circle round a table laden with cups and wineglasses.

Their cigars shone like eyes in the darkness which, minute by minute, was growing thicker. They had been talking about a frightful accident which had occurred the night before—two men and three women drowned before the eyes of the guests in the river opposite.

General de G—— remarked:

“Yes, these things are affecting, but they are not horrible.

“The horrible, that well-known word, means much more than the terrible. A frightful accident like this moves, upsets, scares; it does not horrify. In order that we should experience horror, something more is needed than the mere excitation of the soul,

something more than the spectacle of the dreadful death; there must be a shuddering sense of mystery or a sensation of abnormal terror beyond the limits of nature. A man who dies, even in the most dramatic conditions, does not excite horror; a field of battle is not horrible; blood is not horrible; the vilest crimes are rarely horrible.

"Now, here are two personal examples, which have shown me what is the meaning of horror:

"It was during the war of 1870. We were retreating toward Pont-Audemer, after having passed through Rouen. The army, consisting of about twenty thousand men, twenty thousand men in disorder, disbanded, demoralized, exhausted, was going to reform at Havre.

"The earth was covered with snow. The night was falling. They had not eaten anything since the day before, and were flying rapidly, the Prussians not far off. The Norman country, livid, dotted with the shadows of the trees surrounding the farms, stretched away under a heavy and sinister black sky.

"Nothing else could be heard in the wan twilight save the confused sound, soft and undefined, of a marching throng, an endless tramping, mingled with the vague clink of canteens or sabers. The men, bent, round-shouldered, dirty, in many cases even in rags, dragged themselves along, hurrying through the snow, with a long broken-backed stride.

"The skin of their hands stuck to the steel of their muskets' butt-ends, for it was freezing dreadfully that night. I frequently saw a little soldier take off his shoes in order to walk barefooted, so much did his footgear bruise him; and with every step he left a

track of blood. Then, after some time, he sat down in a field for a few minutes' rest, and never got up again. Every man who sat down died.

"Should we have left behind us those poor exhausted soldiers, who fondly counted on being able to start afresh as soon as they had somewhat refreshed their stiffened legs? Now, scarcely had they ceased to move, and to make their almost frozen blood circulate in their veins, than an unconquerable torpor congealed them, nailed them to the ground, closed their eyes, and in one second the overworked human mechanism collapsed. They gradually sank down, their heads falling toward their knees—without, however, quite tumbling over, for their loins and their limbs lost the capacity for moving, and became as hard as wood, impossible to bend or straighten.

"The rest of us, more robust, kept still straggling on, chilled to the marrow of our bones, advancing by dint of forced movement through the night, through that snow, through that cold and deadly country, crushed by pain, by defeat, by despair, above all overcome by the abominable sensation of abandonment, of death, of nothingness.

"I saw two gendarmes holding by the arm a curious-looking little man, old, beardless, of truly surprising aspect.

"They were looking out for an officer, believing that they had caught a spy. The word 'Spy' at once spread through the midst of the stragglers, and they gathered in a group round the prisoner. A voice exclaimed: 'He must be shot!' And all these soldiers who were falling from utter prostration, only holding themselves on their feet by leaning on their

guns, felt of a sudden that thrill of furious and bestial anger which urges on a mob to massacre.

"I wanted to speak! I was at that time in command of a battalion; but they no longer recognized the authority of their commanding officers; they would have shot me.

"One of the gendarmes said: 'He has been following us for the last three days. He has been asking information from everyone about the artillery.'

"I took it on myself to question this person:

"'What are you doing? What do you want? Why are you accompanying the army?'

"He stammered out some words in some unintelligible dialect. He was, indeed, a strange being, with narrow shoulders, a sly look, and such an agitated air in my presence that I had no longer any real doubt that he was a spy. He seemed very aged and feeble. He kept staring at me from under his eyes with a humble, stupid, and crafty air.

"The men all round us exclaimed:

"'To the wall! to the wall!'

"I said to the gendarmes:

"'Do you answer for the prisoner?'

"I had not ceased speaking when a terrible push threw me on my back, and in a second I saw the man seized by the furious soldiers, thrown down, struck, dragged along the side of the road, and flung against a tree. He fell in the snow, nearly dead already.

"And immediately they shot him. The soldiers fired at him, reloaded their guns, fired again with the desperate energy of brutes. They fought with each other to have a shot at him, filed off in front of the

corpse, and kept firing at him, just as people at a funeral keep sprinkling holy water in front of a coffin.

"But suddenly a cry arose of 'The Prussians! the Prussians!' and all along the horizon I heard the great noise of this panic-stricken army in full flight.

"The panic, generated by these shots fired at this vagabond, had filled his very executioners with terror; and, without realizing that they were themselves the originators of the scare, they rushed away and disappeared in the darkness.

"I remained alone in front of the corpse with the two gendarmes whom duty had compelled to stay with me.

"They lifted up this riddled piece of flesh, bruised and bleeding.

"'He must be examined,' said I to them.

"And I handed them a box of vestas which I had in my pocket. One of the soldiers had another box. I was standing between the two.

"The gendarme, who was feeling the body, called out:

"'Clothed in a blue blouse, trousers, and a pair of shoes.'

"The first match went out; we lighted a second. The man went on, as he turned out the pockets:

"'A horn knife, check handkerchief, a snuffbox, a bit of packthread, a piece of bread.'

"The second match went out; we lighted a third. The gendarme, after having handled the corpse for a long time, said:

"'That is all.'

"I said:

“‘Strip him. We shall perhaps find something near the skin.’

“And, in order that the two soldiers might help each other in this task, I stood between them to give them light. I saw them, by the rapid and speedily extinguished flash of the match, take off the garments one by one, and expose to view that bleeding bundle of flesh still warm, though lifeless.

“And suddenly one of them exclaimed:

“‘Good God, Colonel, it is a woman!’

“I cannot describe to you the strange and poignant sensation of pain that moved my heart. I could not believe it, and I kneeled down in the snow before this shapeless pulp of flesh to see for myself: it was a woman.

“The two gendarmes, speechless and stunned, waited for me to give my opinion on the matter. But I did not know what to think, what theory to adopt.

“Then the brigadier slowly drawled out:

“‘Perhaps she came to look for a son of hers in the artillery, whom she had not heard from.’

“And the other chimed in:

“‘Perhaps indeed that is so.’

“And I, who had seen some terrible things in my time, began to weep. I felt, in the presence of this corpse, in that icy cold night, the midst of that gloomy plain, at the sight of this mystery, at the sight of this murdered stranger, the meaning of that word ‘horror.’

“Now, I had the same sensation last year while interrogating one of the survivors of the Flatters Mission, an Algerian sharpshooter.

"You probably know some of the details of this atrocious drama. It is possible, however, that you are unacquainted with all.

"The Colonel traveled through the desert into the Soudan, and passed through the immense territory of the Touaregs, who are, in that great ocean of sand which stretches from the Atlantic to Egypt and from the Soudan to Algeria, a sort of pirates resembling those who ravaged the seas in former days.

"The guides who accompanied the column belonged to the tribe of Chambaa, of Ouargla.

"One day, they pitched their camp in the middle of the desert, and the Arabs declared that, as the spring was a little farther away, they would go with all their camels to look for water.

"Only one man warned the Colonel that he had been betrayed. Flatters did not believe this, and accompanied the convoy with the engineers, the doctors, and nearly all his officers.

"They were massacred round the spring and all the camels captured.

"The Captain of the Arab Intelligence Department at Ouargla, who had remained in the camp, took command of the survivors, spahis and sharpshooters, and commenced the retreat, leaving behind the baggage and the provisions for want of camels to carry them.

"Then they started on their journey through this solitude without shade and without limit, under a devouring sun, which parched them from morning till night.

"One tribe came to tender its submission and brought dates as a tribute. They were poisoned.

Nearly all the French died, and among them, the last officer.

"There now only remained a few spahis, with their quartermaster, Pobéguin, and some native sharpshooters of the Chambaa tribe. They had still two camels left. These disappeared one night along with two Arabs.

"Then the survivors feared that they would have to eat each other up. As soon as they discovered the flight of the two men with the two beasts, those who remained separated, and proceeded to march, one by one, through the soft sand, under the glare of a scorching sun, at a distance of more than a gunshot from each other.

"So they went on all day, and, when they reached a spring, each of them came up to drink at it in turn as soon as each solitary marcher had moved forward the number of yards arranged upon. And thus they continued marching the whole day, raising, everywhere they passed in that level burned-up expanse, those little columns of dust which, at a distance, indicate those who are trudging through the desert.

"But, one morning, one of the travelers made a sudden turn, and drew nearer to his neighbor. And they all stopped to look.

"The man toward whom the famished soldier drew near did not fly, but lay flat on the ground, and took aim at the one who was coming on. When he believed he was within gunshot, he fired. The other was not hit, and continued to advance, and cocking his gun in turn, killed his comrade.

"Then from the entire horizon, the others rushed

to seek their share. And he who had killed the fallen man, cutting the corpse into pieces, distributed it.

“Then they once more placed themselves at fixed distances, these irreconcilable allies, preparing for the next murder which would bring them together.

“For two days they lived on this human flesh, **which they divided** among each other. Then, the famine **came** back, and he who had killed the first man began **killing** afresh. And again, like a butcher, he cut up the **corpse** and offered it to his comrades, keeping only his own portion of it. This retreat of cannibals continued. The last Frenchman, Pobéguin, was massacred at the side of a well the very night before the supplies arrived.

“Do you understand now what I mean by the ‘horrible?’”

This was the story told us a few nights ago by General de G——.

THE FIRST SNOWFALL



THE long promenade of La Croisette runs in a curve up to the edge of the blue water. Over there, at the right, the Esterel advances far into the sea. It obstructs the view, shutting in the horizon with the pretty southern aspect of its peaked, numerous, and fantastic summits.

At the left, the isles of Sainte-Marguerite and Saint-Honorat, lying in the water, present long aisles of fir-trees.

And all along the great gulf, all along the tall mountains that encircle Cannes, the white villa residences seem to be sleeping in the sunlight. You can see them from a distance, the bright houses, scattered from the top to the bottom of the mountains, dotting the dark greenery with specks of snow.

Those near the water open their gates on the vast promenade which is lashed by the quiet waves. The air is soft and balmy. It is one of those days when in this southern climate the chill of winter is not felt, Above the walls of the gardens may be seen orange-

trees and citron-trees full of golden fruit. Ladies advance with slow steps over the sand of the avenue, followed by children rolling hoops or chatting with gentlemen.

* * * * *

A young lady had just passed out through the door of her coquettish little house facing La Croisette. She stops for a moment to gaze at the promenaders, smiles, and, with the gait of one utterly enfeebled, makes her way toward an empty bench right in front of the sea. Fatigued after having gone twenty paces, she sits down out of breath. Her pale face seems that of a dead woman. She coughs, and raises to her lips her transparent fingers as if to stop those shakings that exhaust her.

She gazes at the sky full of sunshine and at the swallows, at the zigzag summits of the Esterel over there, and at the sea, quite close to her, so blue, so calm, so beautiful.

She smiles still, and murmurs:

“Oh! how happy I am!”

She knows, however, that she is going to die, that she will never see the springtime, that in a year, along the same promenade, these same people who pass before her now will come again to breathe the warm air of this charming spot, with their children a little bigger, with their hearts all filled with hopes, with tenderness, with happiness, while at the bottom of an oak coffin the poor flesh which is left to her still to-day will have fallen into a condition of rottenness, leaving only her bones lying in the silk robe which she has selected for a winding-sheet.

She will be no more. Everything in life will go

on as before for others. For her life will be over—over forever. She will be no more. She smiles, and inhales as well as she can, with her diseased lungs, the perfumed air of the gardens.

And she sinks into a reverie.

* * * * *

She recalls the past. She had been married, four years ago, to a Norman gentleman. He was a strong young man, bearded, healthy looking, with wide shoulders, narrow mind, and joyous disposition.

They had been united through worldly motives which she did not quite understand. She would willingly have said "Yes." She did say "Yes," with a movement of the head in order not to thwart her father and mother. She was a Parisian, gay and full of the joy of living.

Her husband brought her home to his Norman château. It was a huge stone building surrounded by tall trees of great age. A high clump of fir-trees shut out the view in front. On the right an opening in the trees presented a view of the plain which stretched out, quite flat, up to the distant farmsteads. A cross-road passed before the boundary-line leading to the highroad three kilometers away.

Oh! she could remember everything—her arrival, her first day in her new abode, and her isolated fate afterward.

When she stepped out of the carriage, she glanced at the old building and laughingly exclaimed:

"It does not look gay!"

Her husband began to laugh in his turn and replied:

"Pooh! we get used to it! You'll see. I never feel bored in it, for my part."

That day they passed their time in embracing each other, and she did not find it too long. This lasted for the best part of three months. The days passed one after the other in insignificant yet absorbing occupations. She learned the value and the importance of the little things of life. She knew that people can interest themselves in the price of eggs which cost a few centimes more or less according to the seasons.

It was summer. She went to the fields to see the harvest cut. The gaiety of the sunshine kept up the gaiety of her heart.

The autumn came. Her husband went hunting. He started in the morning with his two dogs, Medor and Mirza. Then she remained alone, without grieving herself, moreover, at Henry's absence. She was, however, very fond of him, but he was not missed by her. When he returned home, her affection was specially absorbed by the dogs. She took care of them every evening with a mother's affection, caressed them incessantly, gave them a thousand charming little names which she had no idea of applying to her husband.

He invariably told her all about his hunting. He pointed out the places where he found partridges, expressed his astonishment at not having caught any hares in Joseph Ledentu's clover, or else appeared indignant at the conduct of M. Lechapelier, of Havre, who always followed the border of his estates to shoot game that had been started by him, Henry de Parville.

She replied: "Yes, indeed; it is not right," thinking of something else all the while.

The winter came, the Norman winter, cold and rainy. The endless rain-storms came down on the slates of the great many-angled roof, rising like a blade toward the sky. The road seemed like streams of mud, the country a plain of mud, and no noise could be heard save that of water falling; no movement could be seen save the whirling flight of crows rolling themselves out like a cloud, alighting on a field, and then hurrying away again.

About four o'clock, the army of dark, flying creatures came and perched in the tall beeches at the left of the château, emitting deafening cries. During nearly an hour, they fluttered from tree-top to tree-top, seemed to be fighting, croaked, and made the gray branches move with their black wings. She gazed at them, each evening, with a pressure of the heart, so deeply was she penetrated by the lugubrious melancholy of the night falling on the desolate grounds.

Then she rang for the lamp, and she drew near the fire. She burned heaps of wood without succeeding in warming the spacious apartments invaded by the humidity. She felt cold every day, everywhere, in the drawing-room, at meals in her own apartment. It seemed to her she was cold even in the marrow of her bones. He only came in to dinner, he was always hunting, or else occupied with sowing seed, tilling the soil, and all the work of the country.

He used to come back jolly and covered with mud, rubbing his hands while he exclaimed:

"What wretched weather!" Or else: "It is a good thing to have a fire." Or sometimes: "Well, how are you to-day? Do you feel in good spirits?"

He was happy, in good health, without desires, thinking of nothing else save this simple, sound, and quiet life.

About December, when the snow had come, she suffered so much from the icy-cold air of the château which seemed to have acquired a chill with the centuries it had passed through, as human beings do with years, that she asked her husband one evening:

"Look here, Henry! You ought to have a hot-air plant put into the house; it would dry the walls. I assure you I cannot warm myself from morning till night."

At first he was stunned at this extravagant idea of introducing a hot-air plant into his manor-house. It would have seemed more natural to him to have his dogs fed out of his silver plate. Then, he gave a tremendous laugh which made his chest heave, while he exclaimed:

"A hot-air plant here! A hot-air plant here! Ha! ha! ha! what a good joke!"

She persisted:

"I assure you, dear, I feel frozen; you don't feel it because you are always moving about; but, all the same, I feel frozen."

He replied, still laughing:

"Pooh! you will get used to it, and besides it is excellent for the health. You will only be all the better for it. We are not Parisians, damn it! to live in hot-houses. And besides the spring is quite near."

* * * * *

About the beginning of January, a great misfortune befell her. Her father and her mother died of a

carriage-accident. She came to Paris for the funeral. And her mind was entirely plunged in grief on account of it for about six months.

The softness of fine days at length awakened her, and she lived a sad, drifting life of languor until autumn.

When the cold weather came back, she was brought face to face, for the first time, with the gloomy future. What was she to do? Nothing. What was going to happen to her henceforth? Nothing. What expectation, what hope, could revive her heart? None. A doctor who was consulted declared that she would never have children.

Sharper, more penetrating still than the year before, the cold made her suffer continually.

She stretched out her shivering hands to the big flames. The glaring fire burned her face; but icy puffs seemed to slip down her back and to penetrate between the flesh and her underclothing. And she shook from head to foot. Innumerable currents of air appeared to have taken up their abode in the apartment, living, crafty currents of air, as cruel as enemies. She encountered them every moment; they were incessantly buffeting her, sometimes on the face, sometimes on the hands, sometimes on the neck, with their treacherous, frozen breath.

Once more she spoke of a hot-air plant; but her husband heard her request as if she were asking for the moon. The introduction of such an apparatus at Parville appeared to him as impossible as the discovery of the Philosopher's Stone.

Having been at Rouen on business one day he brought back to his wife a dainty foot-warmer made

of copper, which he laughingly called a "portable hot-water heater"; and he considered that this would prevent her henceforth from ever being cold.

Toward the end of December she understood that she could not live thus always, and she said timidly one evening at dinner:

"Listen, dear! Are we not going to spend a week or two in Paris before spring?"

He was stupefied:

"In Paris? In Paris? But what are we to do there? No, by Jove! We are better off here. What odd ideas come into your head sometimes."

She faltered:

"It might distract us a little."

He did not understand:

"What is it you want to distract you? Theaters, evening parties, dinners in town? You know, however, well that in coming here you ought not to expect any distractions of that kind!"

She saw a reproach in these words and in the tone in which they were uttered. She relapsed into silence. She was timid and gentle, without resisting power and without strength of will.

In January, the cold weather returned with violence. Then the snow covered the earth.

One evening, as she watched the great whirling cloud of crows winding round the trees, she began to weep, in spite of herself.

Her husband came in. He asked, in great surprise:

"What is the matter with you?"

He was happy, quite happy, never having dreamed of another life or other pleasures. He had been born

and had grown up in this melancholy district. He felt well in his own house, at his ease in body and mind.

He did not realize that we may desire events, have a thirst for changing pleasures; he did not understand that it does not seem natural to certain beings to remain in the same places during the four seasons; he seemed not to know that spring, summer, autumn, and winter, have, for multitudes of persons, new pleasures in new countries.

She could not say anything in reply, and she quickly dried her eyes. At last she murmured, in a distracted sort of way:

"I am—I—I am a little sad—I am a little bored."

But she was seized with terror for having even said so much, and she added very quickly:

"And besides—I am—I am a little cold."

At this statement he got angry:

"Ah! yes, still your idea of the hot-air plant. But look here, deuce take it! you have only had one cold since you came here."

* * * * *

The night came. She went up to her room, for she had insisted on having a separate apartment. She went to bed. Even in the bed, she felt cold. She thought: "Is it to be like this always, always till death?"

And she thought of her husband. How could he have said this:

"You have only had one cold since you came here?"

Then she must get ill; she must cough in order that he might understand what she suffered!

And she was filled with indignation, the angry indignation of a weak, a timid being.

She must cough. Then, without doubt, he would take pity on her. Well, she would cough; he would hear her coughing; the doctor should be called in; he would see that her husband would see.

She got up with her legs and her feet naked, and a childish idea made her smile:

"I want a hot-air plant, and I must have it. I shall cough so much that he'll have to put one into the house."

And she sat down almost naked in a chair. She waited an hour, two hours. She shivered, but she did not catch cold. Then she resolved to make use of a bold expedient.

She noiselessly left her room, descended the stairs, and opened the garden-gate.

The earth, covered with snow, seemed dead. She abruptly thrust forward her naked foot, and plunged it into the light and icy froth. A sensation of cold, painful as a wound, mounted up to her heart. However, she stretched out the other leg and began to descend the steps slowly.

Then she advanced through the grass, saying to herself:

"I'll go as far as the fir-trees."

She walked with quick steps, out of breath, choking every time she drove her foot through the snow.

She touched the first fir-tree with her hand, as if to convince herself that she carried out her plan to the end; then she went back into the house. She believed two or three times that she was going to fall, so torpid and weak did she feel. Before going

in, meanwhile, she sat in that icy snow, and she even gathered some in order to rub to her breast.

Then she went in, and got into bed. It seemed to her, at the end of an hour, that she had a swarm of ants in her throat, and that other ants were running all over her limbs. She slept, however.

Next day, she was coughing, and she could not get up.

She got inflammation of the lungs. She became delirious, and in her delirium she asked for a hot-air plant. The doctor insisted on having one put in. Henry yielded, but with an irritated repugnance.

* * * * *

She could not be cured. The lungs, severely attacked, made those who attended on her uneasy about her life.

"If she remains here, she will not last as long as the next cold weather," said the doctor.

She was sent to the south. She came to Cannes, recognized the sun, loved the sea, and breathed the air of orange-blossoms. Then in the spring, she returned north. But she lived with the fear of being cured, with the fear of the long winters of Normandy; and as soon as she was better, she opened her window by night while thinking of the sweet banks of the Mediterranean. And now she was going to die. She knew it and yet she was contented.

She unfolds a newspaper which she had not already opened, and reads this heading:

"THE FIRST SNOW IN PARIS."

After this, she shivers and yet smiles. She looks across at the Esterel which is turning rose-colored

under the setting sun. She looks at the vast blue sky, so blue, so very blue, and the vast blue sea, so very blue also, and rises up and returns to the house, with slow steps, only stopping to cough, for she had remained out too long; and she has caught cold, a slight cold.

She finds a letter from her husband. She opens it still smiling, and she reads:

"MY DEAR LOVE: I hope you are going on well, and that you do not regret too much our beautiful district. We have had for some days past a good frost which announces snow. For my part, I adore this weather, and you understand that I am keeping that cursed hot-air plant of yours going.—"

She ceases reading, quite happy at the thought that she has had her hot-air plant. Her right hand, which holds the letter, falls down slowly over her knees, while she raises her left hand to her mouth, as if to calm the obstinate cough which is tearing her chest.

BOITELLE



PÈRE BOITELLE (Antoine) had the reputation through the whole country of a specialist in dirty jobs. Every time a pit, a dunghill, or a cesspool required to be cleared away, or a dirt-hole to be cleansed out, he was the person employed to do it.

He would come there with his nightman's tools and his wooden shoes covered with dirt, and would set to work, whining incessantly about the nature of his occupation. When people asked him why he did this loathsome work, he would reply resignedly:

"Faith, 'tis for my children whom I must support. This brings in more than anything else."

He had, indeed, fourteen children. If anyone asked him what had become of them, he would say with an air of indifference:

"There are only eight of them left in the house. One is out at service, and five are married."

When the questioner wanted to know whether they were well married, he replied vivaciously:

"I did not cross them. I crossed them in nothing. They married just as they pleased. We shouldn't go against people's likings—it turns out badly. I am a night-cartman because my parents went against my likings. But for that I would have become a workman like the others."

Here is the way his parents had thwarted him in his likings:

He was at that time a soldier stationed at Havre, not more stupid than another, or sharper either, a rather simple fellow, in truth. During his hours of freedom his greatest pleasure was to walk along the quay, where the bird-dealers congregate. Sometimes alone, sometimes with a soldier from his own part of the country, he would slowly saunter along by cages where parrots with green backs and yellow heads from the banks of the Amazon, parrots with gray backs and red heads from Senegal, enormous macaws, which looked like birds brought up in conservatories, with their flower-like feathers, plumes, and tufts, parquets of every shape, painted with minute care by that excellent miniaturist, God Almighty, with the little young birds, hopping about, yellow, blue, and variegated, mingling their cries with the noise of the quay, added to the din caused by the unloading of the vessels, as well as by passengers and vehicles—a violent clamor, loud, shrill, and deafening, as if from some distant, monstrous forest.

Boitelle would stop, with strained eyes, wide-open mouth, laughing and enraptured, showing his teeth to the captive cockatoos, who kept nodding their white or yellow topknots toward the glaring red of his breeches and the copper buckle of his belt. When

he found a bird that could talk, he put questions to it, and if it happened at the time to be disposed to reply and to hold a conversation with him, he would remain there till nightfall filled with gaiety and contentment. He also found heaps of fun in looking at the monkeys, and could conceive no greater luxury for a rich man than to possess these animals, just like cats and dogs. This taste for the exotic he had in his blood, as people have a taste for the chase, or for medicine, or for the priesthood. He could not refrain, every time the gates of the barracks opened, from going back to the quay, as if drawn toward it by an irresistible longing.

Now, on one occasion, having stopped almost in ecstasy before an enormous ararauna, which was swelling out its plumes, bending forward, and bridling up again, as if making the court-courtesies of parrot-land, he saw the door of a little tavern adjoining the bird-dealer's shop opening, and his attention was attracted by a young negress, with a silk kerchief tied round her head, sweeping into the street the rubbish and the sand of the establishment.

Boitelle's attention was soon divided between the bird and the woman, and he really could not tell which of these two beings he contemplated with the greater astonishment and delight.

The negress, having got rid of the sweepings of the tavern, raised her eyes, and, in her turn, was dazzled by the soldier's uniform. There she stood facing him with her broom in her hands as if she were presenting arms for him, while the ararauna continued making courtesies. Now at the end of a few

seconds the soldier began to get embarrassed by this attention, and he walked away gingerly so as not to present the appearance of beating a retreat.

But he came back. Almost every day he passed in front of the Colonial tavern, and often he could distinguish through the windowpanes the figure of the little black-skinned maid filling out "bocks" or glasses of brandy for the sailors of the port. Frequently, too, she would come out to the door on seeing him. Soon, without even having exchanged a word, they smiled at one another like old acquaintances; and Boitelle felt his heart moved when he saw suddenly glittering between the dark lips of the girl her shining row of white teeth. At length, he ventured one day to enter, and was quite surprised to find that she could speak French like everyone else. The bottle of lemonade, of which she was good enough to accept a glassful, remained in the soldier's recollection memorably delicious; and it became habitual with him to come and absorb in this little tavern on the quay all the agreeable drinks which he could afford.

For him it was a treat, a happiness, on which his thoughts were constantly dwelling, to watch the black hand of the little maid pouring out something into his glass while her teeth, brighter than her eyes, showed themselves as she laughed. When they had kept company in this way for two months, they became fast friends, and Boitelle, after his first astonishment at discovering that this negress was in principle as good as the best girls in the country, that she exhibited a regard for economy, industry, religion, and good conduct, loved her more on that account, and

became so much smitten with her that he wanted to marry her.

He told her about his intentions, which made her dance with joy. Besides, she had a little money, left her by a female oyster-dealer, who had picked her up when she had been left on the quay at Havre by an American captain. This captain had found her, when she was only about six years old, lying on bales of cotton in the hold of his ship, some hours after his departure from New York. On his arrival in Havre, he there abandoned to the care of this compassionate oyster-dealer the little black creature, who had been hidden on board his vessel, he could not tell how or why.

The oyster-woman having died, the young negress became a servant at the Colonial tavern.

Antoine Boitelle added: "This will be all right if my parents don't go against it. I will never go against them, you understand—never! I'm going to say a word or two to them the first time I go back to the country."

On the following week, in fact, having obtained twenty-four hours' leave, he went to see his family, who cultivated a little farm at Tourteville near Yvetot.

He waited till the meal was finished, the hour when the coffee baptized with brandy makes people more open-hearted, before informing his parents that he had found a girl answering so well to his likings in every way that there could not exist any other in all the world so perfectly suited to him.

The old people, at this observation, immediately assumed a circumspect air, and wanted explanations.

At first he concealed nothing from them except the color of her skin.

She was a servant, without much means, but strong, thrifty, clean, well-conducted, and sensible. All these things were better than money would be in the hands of a bad housewife. Moreover, she had a few sous, left her by a woman who had reared her,—a good number of sous, almost a little dowry,—fifteen hundred francs in the savings' bank. The old people, overcome by his talk, and relying, too, on their own judgment, were gradually giving way, when he came to the delicate point. Laughing in rather a constrained fashion, he said:

"There's only one thing you may not like. She is not white."

They did not understand, and he had to explain at some length and very cautiously, to avoid shocking them, that she belonged to the dusky race of which they had only seen samples among figures exhibited at Epinal. Then, they became restless, perplexed, alarmed, as if he had proposed a union with the Devil.

The mother said: "Black? How much of her is black? Is it the whole of her?"

He replied: "Certainly. Everywhere, just as you are white everywhere."

The father interposed: "Black? Is it as black as the pot?"

The son answered: "Perhaps a little less than that. She is black, but not disgustingly black. The curé's cassock is black; but it is not uglier than a surplice, which is white."

The father said: "Are there more black people besides her in her country?"

And the son, with an air of conviction, exclaimed: "Certainly!"

But the old man shook his head: "This must be disagreeable!"

Said the son: "It isn't more disagreeable than anything else, seeing that you get used to it in no time."

The mother asked: "It doesn't soil linen more than other skins, this black skin?"

"Not more than your own, as it is her proper color."

Then, after many other questions, it was agreed that the parents should see this girl before coming to any decision and that the young fellow, whose period of service was coming to an end in the course of a month, should bring her to the house in order that they might examine her, and decide by talking the matter over whether or not she was too dark to enter the Boitelle family.

Antoine accordingly announced that on Sunday, the twenty-second of May, the day of his discharge, he would start for Tourteville with his sweetheart.

She had put on, for this journey to the house of her lover's parents, her most beautiful and most gaudy clothes, in which yellow, red, and blue were the prevailing colors, so that she had the appearance of one adorned for a national *fête*.

At the terminus, as they were leaving Havre, people stared at her very much, and Boitelle was proud of giving his arm to a person who commanded so much attention. Then, in the third-class carriage, in which she took a seat by his side, she excited so much astonishment among the peasants that the peo-

ple in the adjoining compartments got up on their benches to get a look at her over the wooden partition which divided the different portions of the carriage from one another. A child, at sight of her, began to cry with terror, another concealed his face in his mother's apron. Everything went off well, however, up to their arrival at their destination. But, when the train slackened its rate of motion as they drew near Yvetot, Antoine felt ill at ease, as he would have done at an inspection when he did not know his drill-practice. Then, as he put his head out through the carriage door, he recognized, some distance away, his father, who was holding the bridle of the horse yoked to a carriage, and his mother who had made her way to the railed portion of the platform where a number of spectators had gathered.

He stepped out first, gave his hand to his sweetheart, and holding himself erect, as if he were escorting a general, he advanced toward his family.

The mother, on seeing this black lady, in variegated costume in her son's company, remained so stupefied that she could not open her mouth; and the father found it hard to hold the horse, which the engine or the negress caused to rear for some time without stopping. But Antoine, suddenly seized with the unmingled joy of seeing once more the old people, rushed forward with open arms, embraced his mother, embraced his father, in spite of the nag's fright, and then turning toward his companion, at whom the passengers on the platform stopped to stare with amazement, he proceeded to explain:

"Here she is! I told you that, at first sight, she

seems odd; but as soon as you know her, in very truth, there's not a better sort in the whole world. Say good morrow to her without making any bother about it."

Thereupon, Mère Boitelle, herself nearly frightened out of her wits, made a sort of courtesy, while the father took off his cap, murmuring: "I wish you good luck!"

Then, without further delay, they climbed up on the car, the two women at the lower end on seats, which made them jump up and down as the vehicle went jolting along the road, and the two men outside on the front seat.

Nobody spoke. Antoine, ill at ease, whistled a barrack-room air; his father lashed the nag; and his mother, from where she sat in the corner, kept casting sly glances at the negress, whose forehead and cheek-bones shone in the sunlight like well-blackened shoes.

Wishing to break the ice, Antoine turned round.

"Well," said he, "we don't seem inclined to talk."

"We must get time," replied the old woman.

He went on:

"Come! tell us the little story about that hen of yours that laid eight eggs."

It was a funny anecdote of long standing in the family. But, as his mother still remained silent, paralyzed by emotion, he started the talking himself and narrated, with much laughter on his own part, this memorable adventure. The father, who knew it by heart, brightened up at the opening words of the narrative; his wife soon followed his example; and the

negress herself, when he had reached the drollest part of it, suddenly gave vent to a laugh so noisy, rolling, and torrentlike that the horse, becoming excited, broke into a gallop for a little while.

This served as the introduction to their acquaintanceship. The company at length began to chat.

On reaching the house they all alighted, and he conducted his sweetheart to a room so that she might take off her dress, to avoid staining it while preparing a good dish intended to win the old people's affections by appealing to their stomachs. Then he drew his parents aside near the door, and with beating heart, asked:

"Well, what do you say now?"

The father said nothing. The mother, less timid, exclaimed:

"She is too black. No, indeed, this is too much for me. It turns my blood."

"That may be, but it is only for the moment."

They then made their way into the interior of the house where the good woman was somewhat affected at the spectacle of the negress engaged in cooking. She at once proceeded to assist her, with petticoats tucked up, active in spite of her age.

The meal was an excellent one—very long, very enjoyable. When they had afterward taken a turn together, Antoine said to his father:

"Well, dad, what do you say to this?"

The peasant took care never to compromise himself.

"I have no opinion about it. Ask your mother."

So Antoine went back to his mother, and, leading her to the end of the room, said:

"Well, mother, what do you think of her?"

"My poor lad, she is really too black. If she were only a little less black, I would not go against you, but this is too much. One would think it was Satan!"

He did not press her, knowing how obstinate the old woman had always been, but he felt a tempest of disappointment sweeping over his heart. He was turning over in his mind what he ought to do, what plan he could devise, surprised, moreover, that she had not conquered them already as she had captivated himself. And they all four set out with slow steps through the cornfields, having again relapsed into silence. Whenever they passed a fence, they saw a countryman sitting on the stile and a group of brats climbing up to stare at them. People rushed out into the road to see the "black" whom young Boitelle had brought home with him. At a distance they noticed people scampering across the fields as they do when the drum beats to draw public attention to some living phenomenon. Père and Mère Boitelle, scared by this curiosity, which was exhibited everywhere through the country at their approach, quickened their pace, walking side by side, leaving far behind their son, whom his dark companion asked what his parents thought of her.

He hesitatingly replied that they had not yet made up their minds.

But on the village-green, people rushed out of all the houses in a flutter of excitement; and, at the sight of the gathering rabble, old Boitelle took to his heels, and regained his abode, while Antoine, swelling with rage, his sweetheart on his arm, advanced

majestically under the battery of staring eyes, opened wide in amazement.

He understood that it was at an end, that there was no hope for him, that he could not marry his negress. She also understood it; and as they drew near the farmhouse they both began to weep. As soon as they had got back to the house, she once more took off her dress to aid the mother in her household duties, and followed her everywhere, to the dairy, to the stable, to the henhouse, taking on herself the hardest part of the work, repeating always, "Let me do it, Madame Boitelle," so that, when night came on, the old woman, touched but inexorable, said to her son: "She is a good girl, all the same. 'Tis a pity she is so black; but indeed she is too much so. I couldn't get used to it. She must go back again. She is too black!"

And young Boitelle said to his sweetheart:

"She will not consent. She thinks you are too black. You must go back again. I will go with you to the train. No matter—don't fret. I am going to talk to them after you have started."

He then conducted her to the railway-station, still cheering her up with hope, and, when he had kissed her, he put her into the train, which he watched as it passed out of sight, his eyes swollen with tears. In vain did he appeal to the old people. They would not give their consent.

And when he had told this story, which was known all over the country, Antoine Boitelle would always add:

"From that time forward I have had no heart for anything—for anything at all. No trade suited me

any longer, and so I became what I am—a night-cartman.”

People would say to him: “Yet you got married.”

“Yes, and I can’t say that my wife didn’t please me, seeing that I’ve got fourteen children; but she is not the other one, oh! no—certainly not! The other one, mark you, my negress, she had only to give me one glance and I felt as if I were in Heaven!”

A LUCKY BURGLAR



THEY were seated in the dining-room of a hotel in Barbizon.

"I tell you, you will not believe it."

"Well, tell it anyhow."

"All right, here goes. But first I must tell you that my story is absolutely true in every respect; even if it does sound improbable." And the old artist commenced:

"We had dined at Soriel's that night.

When I say dined, that means that we were all pretty well tipsy. We were three young madcaps. Soriel (poor fellow! he is dead now), Le Poittevin, the marine painter, and myself. Le Poittevin is dead, also.

"We had stretched ourselves on the floor of the little room adjoining the studio and the only one in the crowd who was rational was Le Poittevin. Soriel, who was always the maddest, lay flat on his back, with his feet propped up on a chair, discussing war and the uniforms of the Empire, when, suddenly, he got up, took out of the big wardrobe where he kept his accessories a complete hussar's uniform and put it on. He then took out a grenadier's uniform and

told Le Poittevin to put it on; but he objected, so we forced him into it. It was so big for him that he was completely lost in it. I arrayed myself as a cuirassier. After we were ready, Soriel made us go through a complicated drill. Then he exclaimed: 'As long as we are troopers let us drink like troopers.'

"The punch-bowl had been brought out and filled for the second time. We were bawling some old camp songs at the top of our voice, when Le Poittevin, who in spite of all the punch had retained his self-control, held up his hand and said: 'Hush! I am sure I heard some one walking in the studio.'

" 'A burglar!' said Soriel, staggering to his feet. 'Good luck!' And he began the 'Marseillaise':

" 'To arms, citizens!'

"Then he seized several weapons from the wall and equipped us according to our uniforms. I received a musket and a saber. Le Poittevin was handed an enormous gun with a bayonet attached. Soriel, not finding just what he wanted, seized a pistol, stuck it in his belt, and brandishing a battle-axe in one hand, he opened the studio door cautiously. The army advanced. Having reached the middle of the room Soriel said:

" 'I am general. You [pointing to me], the cuirassiers, will keep the enemy from retreating—that is, lock the door. You [pointing to Le Poittevin], the grenadiers, will be my escort.'

"I executed my orders and rejoined the troops, who were behind a large screen reconnoitering. Just as I reached it I heard a terrible noise. I rushed up with the candle to investigate the cause of it and this

is what I saw. Le Poittevin was piercing the dummy's breast with his bayonet and Soriel was splitting his head open with his axe! When the mistake had been discovered the General commanded: 'Be cautious!'

"We had explored every nook and corner of the studio for the past twenty minutes without success, when Le Poittevin thought he would look in the cupboard. As it was quite deep and very dark, I advanced with the candle and looked in. I drew back stupefied. A man, a real live man this time, stood there looking at me! I quickly recovered myself, however, and locked the cupboard door. We then retired a few paces to hold a council.

"Opinions were divided. Soriel wanted to smoke the burglar out; Le Poittevin suggested starvation, and I proposed to blow him up with dynamite. Le Poittevin's idea being finally accepted as the best, we proceed to bring the punch and pipes into the studio, while Le Poittevin kept guard with his big gun on his shoulder, and settling ourselves in front of the cupboard we drank the prisoner's health. We had done this repeatedly, when Soriel suggested that we bring out the prisoner and take a look at him.

"'Hooray!' cried I. We picked up our weapons and made a mad rush for the cupboard door. It was finally opened, and Soriel, cocking his pistol which was not loaded, rushed in first. Le Poittevin and I followed yelling like lunatics and, after a mad scramble in the dark, we at last brought out the burglar. He was a haggard-looking, white-haired old bandit, with shabby, ragged clothes. We bound him hand and foot and dropped him in an armchair. He said nothing.

“‘We will try this wretch’ said Soriel, whom the punch had made very solemn. I was so far gone that it seemed to me quite a natural thing. Le Poittevin was named for the defense and I for the prosecution. The prisoner was condemned to death by all except his counsel.

“‘We will now execute him,’ said Soriel. ‘Still, this man cannot die without repenting,’ he added, feeling somewhat scrupulous. ‘Let us send for a priest.’

“I objected that it was too late, so he proposed that I officiate and forthwith told the prisoner to confess his sins to me. The old man was terrified. He wondered what kind of wretches we were and for the first time he spoke. His voice was hollow and cracked:

“‘Say, you don’t mean it, do you?’

“Soriel forced him to his knees, and for fear he had not been baptized, poured a glass of rum over his head, saying: ‘Confess your sins; your last hour has come!’

“‘Help! Help!’ screamed the old man rolling himself on the floor and kicking everything that came his way. For fear he should wake the neighbors we gagged him.

“‘Come, let us end this’; said Soriel impatiently. He pointed his pistol at the old man and pressed the trigger. I followed his example, but as neither of our guns were loaded we made very little noise. Le Poittevin, who had been looking on said:

“‘Have we really the right to kill this man?’

“‘We have condemned him to death!’ said Soriel.

“‘Yes, but we have no right to shoot a civilian. Let us take him to the station-house.’

“We agreed with him, and as the old man could not walk we tied him to a board, and Le Poittevin and I carried him, while Soriel kept guard in the rear. We arrived at the station-house. The chief, who knew us and was well acquainted with our manner of joking, thought it was a great lark and laughingly refused to take our prisoner in. Soriel insisted, but the chief told us very sternly to quit our fooling and go home and be quiet. There was nothing else to do but to take him back to Soriel’s.

“‘What are we going to do with him?’ I asked.

“‘The poor man must be awfully tired!’ said Le Poittevin, sympathizingly.

“He did look half dead, and in my turn I felt a sudden pity for him (the punch, no doubt), and I relieved him of his gag.

“‘How do you feel old man?’ I asked.

“‘By Jingo! I have enough of this,’ he groaned.

“Then Soriel softened. He unbound him and treated him as a long-lost friend. The three of us immediately brewed a fresh bowl of punch. As soon as it was ready we handed a glass to the prisoner, who quaffed it without flinching. Toast followed toast. The old man could drink more than the three of us put together; but as daylight appeared, he got up and calmly said: ‘I shall be obliged to leave you; I must get home now.’

“We begged him not to go, but he positively refused to stay any longer. We were awfully sorry and took him to the door, while Soriel held the candle above his head saying: ‘Look out for the last step.’”

AN ODD FEAST



IT WAS in the winter of—I do not remember what year, that I went to Normandy to visit my bachelor cousin, Jules de Banneville, who lived alone in the old manor, with a cook, a valet, and a keeper. I had the hunting fever and for a month did nothing else from morning until night.

The castle, an old, gray building surrounded with pines and avenues of tall oak-trees, looked as if it had been deserted for centuries. The antique furniture and the portraits of Jules's ancestors were the only inhabitants of the spacious rooms and halls now closed.

We had taken shelter in the only habitable room, an immense kitchen, which had been plastered all over to keep the rats out. The big, white walls were covered with whips, guns, horns, etc., and in the large fireplace a brushwood fire was burning, throwing strange lights around the corners of the dismal room. We would sit in front of the fire every night, our hounds stretched in every available space

between our feet, dreaming and barking in their sleep, until, getting drowsy, we would climb to our rooms and slip into our beds shivering.

It had been freezing hard that day and we were sitting as usual in front of the fire, watching a hare and two partridges being roasted for dinner, and the savory smell sharpened our appetites.

"It will be awfully cold going to bed to-night," said Jules.

"Yes, but there will be plenty of ducks to-morrow morning," I replied indifferently.

The servant had set our plates at one end of the table and those of the servants at the other.

"Gentlemen, do you know it is Christmas eve?" she asked.

We certainly did not; we never looked at the calendar.

"That accounts for the bells ringing all day," said Jules. "There is midnight service to-night."

"Yes, sir; but they also rang because old Fournel is dead."

Fournel was an old shepherd, well known in the country. He was ninety-six years old and had never known a day's sickness until a month ago, when he had taken cold by falling into a pool on a dark night and had died of the consequences.

"If you like," said Jules, "we will go and see these poor people after dinner."

The old man's family consisted of his grandson, fifty-eight years old and the latter's wife, one year younger. His children had died years ago. They lived in a miserable hut at the entrance of the village.

Perhaps Christmas eve in a lonely castle was an incentive, at all events we were very talkative that night. Our dinner had lasted way into the night and long after the servant had left us, we sat there smoking pipe after pipe, narrating old experiences, telling of past revels and the surprises of the morrow which followed our adventures. Our solitude had brought us closer together and we exchanged those confidences which only intimate friends can.

"I am going to church, sir," said the servant, re-appearing.

"What, so soon!" exclaimed Jules.

"It lacks only a quarter of twelve, sir."

"Let us go to church too," said Jules. "The midnight service is very attractive in the country."

I assented and having wrapped ourselves up we started for the village. It was bitterly cold, but a clear, beautiful night. We could hear the peasants' wooden shoes on the crisp, frozen earth and the church bell ringing in the distance. The road was dotted here and there with dancing lights. It was the peasants carrying lanterns, lighting the way for their wives and children. As we approached the village, Jules said:

"Here is where the Fournels live, let us go in."

We knocked repeatedly, but in vain. A neighboring peasant informed us that they had gone to church to pray for their father.

"We will see them on our way back," said Jules.

The service had begun when we entered the church. It was profusely decorated with small candles, and to the left, in a small chapel, the birth of

Christ was represented by wax figures, pine brush forming a background. The men stood with bowed heads, and the women, kneeling, clasped their hands in deep devotion. After a few minutes Jules said:

"It is stifling in here, let us go outside."

We left the shivering peasants to their devotions and regaining the deserted road, we resumed our conversation. We had talked so long that the service was over when we came back to the village. A small ray of light filtered through the Fournels' door.

"They are watching their dead," said Jules. "They will be pleased to see us."

We went in. The low, dark room was lighted only by a smoking candle, placed in the middle of the large, coarse table, under which a bread bin had been built, taking up the whole length of it. A suffocating odor of roasted blood pudding pervaded every corner of the room. Seated face to face, were Fournel and his wife, a gloomy and brutish expression on their faces. Between the two, a single plate of the pudding, the popular dish on Christmas eve, out of which they would take turns in cutting a piece off, spread it on their bread and munch in silence. When the man's glass was empty, the woman would fill it out of an earthen jar containing cider.

They asked us to be seated and to "join them," but at our refusal they continued to munch. After a few minutes' silence Jules said:

"Well, Anthime, so your grandfather is dead!"

"Yes, sir, he died this afternoon."

The woman snuffed the candle in silence and I, for the want of something to say, added:

"He was quite old, was he not?"

"Oh, his time was up," she answered; "he was no earthly use here."

An invincible desire to see the old man took possession of me and I asked to see him. The two peasants suddenly became agitated and exchanged questioning glances. Jules noticed this and insisted. Then the man with a sly, suspicious look, asked:

"What good would it do you?"

"No good," said Jules; "but why will you not let us see him?"

"I am willing," said the man, shrugging his shoulders, "but it is kind of unhandy just now."

We conjectured all sorts of things. Neither of them stirred. They sat there with eyes lowered, a sullen expression on their faces seeming to say: "Go away."

"Come, Anthime, take us to his room," said Jules with authority.

"It's no use, my good sir, he isn't there any more," said the man resolutely.

"Where is he?" said Jules.

The woman interrupted, saying:

"You see, sir, we had no other place to put him so we put him in the bin until morning." And having taken the top of the table off, she held the candle near the opening. We looked in and sure enough, there he was, a shriveled gray mass, his gray hair matted about his face, barefooted and rolled up in his shepherd's cloak, sleeping his last sleep among crusts of bread as ancient as himself.

His grandchildren had used as a table the bin which held his body!

Jules was indignant, and pale with anger, said:

"You villians! Why did you not leave him in his bed?"

The woman burst into tears and speaking rapidly:

"You see, my good gentlemen, it's just this way. We have but one bed, and being only three we slept together; but since he's been so sick we slept on the floor. The floor is awful hard and cold these days, my good gentlemen, so when he died this afternoon we said to ourselves: 'As long as he is dead he doesn't feel anything and what's the use of leaving him in bed? He'll be just as comfortable in the bin.' We can't sleep with a dead man, my good gentlemen!—now can we?"

Jules was exasperated and went out banging the door, and I after him, laughing myself sick.

LITTLE LOUISE ROQUE



MEDERIC ROMPEL, the postman, familiarly called by the country people "Mederi," started at his usual hour from the posthouse at Rouy-le-Tors. Having passed through the little town, striding like an old trooper, he cut across the meadows of Villaumes in order to reach the bank of the Brindelle, which led him along the water's edge to the village of Carvelin, where his distribution commenced. He traveled quickly, following the course of the narrow river, which frothed, murmured, and boiled along its bed of grass under the arching willow-trees. The big stones, impeding the flow of water, created around them a sort of aqueous necktie ending in a knot of foam. In some places, there were cascades a foot wide, often invisible, which made under the leaves, under the tendrils, under a roof of verdure, a noise at once angry and gentle. Further on, the banks widened out, and you saw a small, placid lake where trout were swimming in the midst of all that green

vegetation which keeps undulating in the depths of tranquil streams.

Mederic went on without a halt, seeing nothing, and with only one thought in his mind: "My first letter is for the Poivron family; then I have one for M. Renardet; so I must cross the wood."

His blue blouse, fastened round his waist by a black leathern belt, moved in quick, regular fashion above the green hedge of willow-trees; and his stick of stout holly kept time with the steady march of his feet.

He crossed the Brindelle over a bridge formed of a single tree thrown lengthwise, with a rope attached to two stakes driven into the river banks as its only balustrade.

The wood, which belonged to M. Renardet, the mayor of Carvelin, and the largest landowner in the district, consisted of a number of huge old trees, straight as pillars, and extended for about half a league along the left bank of the stream which served as a boundary for this immense arch of foliage. Alongside the water there were large shrubs warmed by the sun: but under the trees you found nothing but moss, thick, soft, plastic moss, which exhaled into the stagnant air a light odor of loam and withered branches.

Mederic slackened his pace, took off his black cap trimmed with red lace, and wiped his forehead, for it was by this time hot in the meadows, though not yet eight o'clock in the morning.

He had just recovered from the effects of the heat, and had accelerated his pace when he noticed at the foot of a tree a knife, a child's small knife. As

he picked it up, he discovered a thimble, and then a needlecase, not far away.

Having found these objects, he thought: "I'll intrust them to the mayor," and resumed his journey. But now he kept his eyes open, expecting to find something else.

All of a sudden, he drew up stiffly as if he had run up against a wooden bar. Ten paces in front of him on the moss, lay stretched on her back a little girl, quite naked. She was about twelve years old. Her arms were hanging down, her legs parted, and her face covered with a handkerchief. There were little spots of blood on her thighs.

Mederic now advanced on tiptoe, as if afraid to make a noise; he apprehended some danger, and glanced toward the spot uneasily.

What was this? No doubt, she was asleep. Then, he reflected that a person does not go to sleep thus, naked, at half past seven in the morning under cool trees. Then she must be dead; and he must be face to face with a crime. At this thought, a cold shiver ran through his frame, although he was an old soldier. And then a murder was such a rare thing in the country—and above all the murder of a child—that he could not believe his eyes. But she had no wound—nothing save these blood drops on her legs. How, then, had she been killed?

He stopped when quite near her and stared at her, while leaning on his stick. Certainly, he knew her, as he knew all the inhabitants of the district; but, not being able to get a look at her face, he could not guess her name. He stooped forward in order to take off the handkerchief which covered her face;

then paused with outstretched hand, restrained by an idea that occurred to him.

Had he the right to disarrange anything in the condition of the corpse before the magisterial investigation? He pictured justice to himself as a general whom nothing escapes, who attaches as much importance to a lost button as to a stab of a knife in the stomach. Perhaps under this handkerchief evidence to support a capital charge could be found; in fact if there were sufficient proof there to secure a conviction, it might lose its value if touched by an awkward hand.

Then he straightened up with the intention of hastening toward the mayor's residence, but again another thought held him back. If the little girl was still alive, by any chance—he could not leave her lying there in this way. He sank on his knees very gently, a yard away from her, through precaution, and stretched his hand toward her feet. The flesh was icy cold, with that terrible coldness which makes dead flesh frightful, and leaves us no longer in doubt. The letter-carrier, as he touched her, felt his heart leap to his mouth, as he said himself afterward, and his lips were parched with dry saliva. Rising up abruptly he rushed off through the trees to M. Renardet's house.

He hurried on in double-quick time, with his stick under his arm, his hands clenched, and his head thrust forward, and his leathern bag, filled with letters and newspapers, flapping regularly at his side.

The mayor's residence was at the end of the wood, which he used as a park, and one side of it was washed by a little lagoon formed at this spot by the Brindelle.

It was a big, square house of gray stone, very old. It had stood many a siege in former days, and at the end of it was a huge tower, twenty meters high, built in the water. From the top of this fortress the entire country around could be seen in olden times. It was called the Fox's Tower, without anyone knowing exactly why; and from this appellation, no doubt, had come the name Renardet, borne by the owners of this fief, which had remained in the same family, it was said, for more than two hundred years. For the Renardets formed part of that upper middle class which is all but noble and was met with so often in the provinces before the Revolution.

The postman dashed into the kitchen where the servants were taking breakfast, and exclaimed:

"Is the mayor up? I want to speak to him at once."

Mederic was recognized as a man of weight and authority, and it was soon understood that something serious had happened.

As soon as word was brought to M. Renardet, he ordered the postman to be sent up to him. Pale and out of breath, with his cap in his hand, Mederic found the mayor seated in front of a long table covered with scattered papers.

He was a big, tall man, heavy and red-faced, strong as an ox, and greatly liked in the district, though of an excessively violent disposition. Very nearly forty years old, and a widower for the past six months, he lived on his estate like a country gentleman. His choleric temperament had often brought him into trouble, from which the magistrates of Rouy-le-Tors, like indulgent and prudent friends,

had extricated him. Had he not one day thrown the conductor of the diligence from the top of his seat because the latter had nearly crushed his retriever, Micmac? Had he not broken the ribs of a game-keeper, who had abused him for having passed through a neighbor's property with a gun in his hand? Had he not even caught by the collar the sub-prefect, who stopped in the village in the course of an administrative round described by M. Renardet as an electioneering tour; for he was against the government, according to his family tradition?

The mayor asked:

"What's the matter now, Mederic?"

"I have found a little girl dead in your wood."

Renardet rose up, with his face the color of brick.

"A little girl, do you say?"

"Yes, M'sieu', a little girl, quite naked, on her back, with blood on her, dead—quite dead!"

The mayor gave vent to an oath:

"By God, I'd make a bet 'tis little Louise Roque! I have just learned that she did not go home to her mother last night. Where did you find her?"

The postman pointed out where the place was, gave full details, and offered to conduct the mayor to the spot.

But Renardet became brusque:

"No, I don't need you. Send the steward, the mayor's secretary, and the doctor immediately to me, and resume your rounds. Quick, go quick, and tell them to meet me in the wood."

The letter-carrier, a man used to discipline, obeyed and withdrew, angry and grieved at not being able to be present at the investigation.

The mayor, in his turn, prepared to go out. He took his hat, a big soft hat, and paused for a few seconds on the threshold of his abode. In front of him stretched a wide lawn in which three large patches were conspicuous—three large beds of flowers in full bloom, one facing the house and the others at either side of it. Further on, rose skyward the principal trees in the wood, while at the left, above the spot where the Brindelle widened into a pool, could be seen long meadows, an entirely flat green sweep of country, cut by dykes and monster-like willows, twisted dwarf-trees, always cut short, having on their thick squat trunks a quivering tuft of branches.

To the right, behind the stables, the outhouses, and the buildings connected with the property, might be seen the village, which was prosperous, being mainly inhabited by raisers of oxen.

Renardet slowly descended the steps in front of his house, and, turning to the left, gained the water's edge, which he followed at a slow pace, his hands behind his back. He went on, with bent head, and from time to time he glanced round in search of the persons for whom he had sent.

When he stood beneath the trees, he stopped, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead as Mederic had done; for the burning sun was shedding its fiery rain upon the ground. Then the mayor resumed his journey, stopped once more, and retraced his steps. Suddenly stooping down, he steeped his handkerchief in the stream that glided at his feet and stretched it round his head, under his hat. Drops of water flowed along his temples, over his purple ears, over

his strong red neck, and trickled, one after the other, under his white shirt-collar.

As yet nobody had appeared; he began tapping with his foot, then he called out: "Hallo! Hallo!"

A voice at his right answered: "Hallo! Hallo!" and the doctor appeared under the trees. He was a thin little man, an ex-military surgeon, who passed in the neighborhood for a very skillful practitioner. He limped, having been wounded while in the service, and had to use a stick to assist him in walking.

Next came the steward and the mayor's secretary, who, having been sent for at the same time, arrived together. They seemed scared, as they hurried forward, out of breath, walking and trotting in turn in order to hasten, and moving their arms up and down so vigorously that they seemed to do more work with them than with their legs.

Renardet said to the doctor:

"You know what the trouble is about?"

"Yes, a child found dead in the wood by Mederic."

"That's quite correct. Come on."

They walked on side by side, followed by the two men.

Their steps made no noise on the moss, their eyes were gazing downward right in front of them.

The doctor hastened his steps, interested by the discovery. As soon as they were near the corpse, he bent down to examine it without touching it. He had put on a pair of glasses, as you do when you are looking at some curious object; then he turned round very quietly and said, without rising up:

"Violated and assassinated, as we shall prove

presently. This little girl, moreover, is almost a woman—look at her throat.”

Her two breasts, already nearly full-developed, fell over her chest, relaxed by death. The doctor lightly drew away the handkerchief which covered her face. It was almost black, frightful to look at, the tongue protruding, the eyes bloodshot. He went on:

“Faith, she was strangled the moment the deed was done.”

He felt her neck:

“Strangled with the hands without leaving any special trace, neither the mark of the nails nor the imprint of the fingers. Quite right. It is little Louise Roque, sure enough!”

He delicately replaced the handkerchief:

“There’s nothing for me to do. She’s been dead for the last hour at least. We must give notice of the matter to the authorities.”

Renardet, standing up, with his hands behind his back, kept staring with a stony look at the little body exposed to view on the grass. He murmured:

“What a wretch! We must find the clothes.”

The doctor felt the hands, the arms, the legs. He said:

“She must have been bathing, no doubt. They ought to be at the water’s edge.”

The mayor thereupon gave directions:

“Do you, Princèpe [this was his secretary], go and look for those clothes for me along the river. Do you, Maxime [this was the steward], hurry on toward Rouy-le-Tors, and bring on here to me the examining magistrate with the gendarmes. They must be here within an hour. You understand.”

The two men quickly departed, and Renardet said to the doctor:

"What miscreant has been able to do such a deed in this part of the country."

The doctor murmured:

"Who knows? Everyone is capable of that! Everyone in particular and nobody in general. However, it must be some prowler, some workman out of employment. As we live under a Republic, we must expect to meet this sort of miscreant along the roads."

Both of them were Bonapartists. The mayor went on:

"Yes, it could only be a stranger, a passer-by, a vagabond without heart or home."

The doctor added with the shadow of a smile on his face:

"And without a wife. Having neither a good supper nor a good bed, he procured the rest for himself. You can't tell how many men there may be in the world capable of a crime at a given moment. Did you know that this little girl had disappeared?"

And with the end of his stick he touched one after the other the stiffened fingers of the corpse, resting on them as on the keys of a piano.

"Yes, the mother came last night to look for me about nine o'clock, the child not having come home for supper up to seven. We went to try and find her along the roads up to midnight, but we did not think of the wood. However, we needed daylight to carry out a search with a practical result."

"Will you have a cigar?" said the doctor.

"Thanks, I don't care to smoke. It gives me a turn to look at this."

They remained standing in front of the young girl's body, pale and still, on the dark background of moss. A big fly was walking along one of the thighs, it stopped at the blood-stains, went on again, always rising higher, ran along the side with his lively, jerky movements, climbed up one of the breasts, then came back again to explore the other. The two men silently watched this wandering black speck. The doctor said:

"How tantalizing it is, a fly on the skin! The ladies of the last century had good reason to paste them on their faces. Why has the fashion gone out?"

But the mayor seemed not to hear, plunged as he was in deep thought.

All of a sudden he turned around, surprised by a shrill noise. A woman in a cap and a blue apron rushed up through the trees. It was the mother, La Roque. As soon as she saw Renardet she began to shriek:

"My little girl, where's my little girl?" in such a distracted manner that she did not glance down at the ground. Suddenly, she saw the corpse, stopped short, clasped her hands, and raised both her arms while she uttered a sharp, heartrending cry—the cry of a mutilated animal. Then, she rushed toward the body, fell on her knees, and snatched away the handkerchief that covered the face. When she saw that frightful countenance, black and convulsed, she recoiled with a shudder, then pressed her face against the ground, giving vent to terrible and continuous choking screams, her mouth close to the thick moss.

Her tall, thin frame, to which her clothes clung tightly, was palpitating, shaken with convulsions. They could see her bony ankles and withered limbs covered with thick blue stockings, shivering horribly. Unconsciously she dug at the soil with her crooked fingers as if to make a grave in which to hide herself.

The doctor pityingly said in a low tone :

“Poor old woman!”

Renardet felt a strange rumbling in his stomach; then he gave vent to a sort of loud sneeze that issued at the same time through nose and mouth; and, drawing his handkerchief from his pocket, began to weep copiously, coughing, sobbing noisily, wiping his face, and stammering:

“Damn—damn—damned pig to do this! I would like to see him guillotined!”

But Princèpe reappeared, with his hands empty. He murmured:

“I have found nothing, M’sieu’, le Maire, nothing at all anywhere.”

The mayor, scared, replied in a thick voice, drowned in tears:

“What is it you could not find?”

“The little girl’s clothes.”

“Well—well—look again, and find them—or you’ll have to answer to me.”

The man, knowing that the mayor would not brook opposition, set forth again with hesitating steps, casting on the corpse horrified and timid glances.

Distant voices arose under the trees, a confused sound, the noise of an approaching crowd; for Mederic had, in the course of his rounds, carried the news

from door to door. The people of the neighborhood, stupefied at first, had gone gossiping from their own firesides into the street, and from one threshold to another. Then they gathered together. They talked over, discussed, and commented on the event for some minutes, and they had now come to see it for themselves.

They arrived in groups, a little faltering and uneasy through fear of the first impression of such a scene on their minds. When they saw the body they stopped, not daring to advance, and speaking low. Then they grew bold, went on a few steps, stopped again, advanced once more, and soon formed around the dead girl, her mother, the doctor, and Renardet, a thick circle, agitated and noisy, which swayed forward under the sudden pushes of the last comers. And now they touched the corpse. Some of them even bent down to feel it with their fingers. The doctor kept them back. But the mayor, waking abruptly out of his torpor, broke into a rage, and, seizing Dr. Labarbe's stick, flung himself on his townspeople, stammering:

"Clear out—clear out—you pack of brutes—clear out!"

And in a second the crowd of sightseers had fallen back two hundred metres.

La Roque was lifted up, turned round, and placed in a sitting posture; she remained weeping with her hands clasped over her face.

The occurrence was discussed among the crowd; and young lads, with eager eyes, curiously scrutinized the nude body of the girl. Renardet perceived this, and, abruptly taking off his vest, flung it over the

little girl, who was entirely lost to view under the wide garment.

The spectators drew quietly nearer. The wood was filled with people, and a continuous hum of voices rose up under the tangled foliage of the tall trees.

The mayor, in his shirt-sleeves, remained standing, with his stick in his hands, in a fighting attitude. He seemed exasperated by this curiosity on the part of the people, and kept repeating:

"If one of you comes nearer, I'll break his head just as I would a dog's."

The peasants were greatly afraid of him. They held back. Dr. Labarbe, who was smoking, sat down beside La Roque, and spoke to her in order to distract her attention. The old woman soon removed her hands from her face, and replied with a flood of tearful words, pouring forth her grief in rapid sentences. She told the whole story of her life, her marriage, the death of her man—a bull-sticker, who had been gored to death—the infancy of her daughter, her wretched existence as a widow without resources and with a child to support. She had only this one, her little Louise, and the child had been killed—killed in this wood. All of a sudden, she felt anxious to see it again, and dragging herself on her knees toward the corpse, she raised up one corner of the garment that covered it; then she let it fall again, and began wailing once more. The crowd remained silent, eagerly watching the mother's gestures.

But all of a sudden there was a swaying of the crowd, and a cry of "The gendarmes! The gendarmes!"

Two gendarmes appeared in the distance, coming on at a rapid trot, escorting their captain and a little gentleman with red whiskers, who was bobbing up and down like a monkey on a big white mare.

The steward had found M. Putoin, the examining magistrate, just at the moment when he was mounting to take his daily ride, for he posed as a good horseman, to the great amusement of the officers.

He dismounted along with the captain, and pressed the hands of the mayor and the doctor, casting a ferret-like glance on the linen vest which swelled above the body lying underneath.

When he was thoroughly acquainted with the facts, he first gave orders to get rid of the public, whom the gendarmes drove out of the wood, but who soon reappeared in the meadow, and formed a line, a long line of excited and moving heads all along the Brindelle, on the other side of the stream.

The doctor in his turn gave explanations of which Renardet took a note in his memorandum book. All the evidence was given, taken down, and commented on without leading to any discovery. Maxime, too, came back without having found any trace of the clothes.

This surprised everybody; no one could explain it on the theory of theft, since these rags were not worth twenty sous; so this theory was inadmissible.

The examining magistrate, the mayor, the captain, and the doctor set to work by searching in pairs, putting aside the smallest branches along the water.

Renardet said to the judge:

"How does it happen that this wretch should conceal or carry away the clothes, and should then

leave the body exposed in the open air and visible to everyone?"

The other, sly and knowing, answered:

"Perhaps a dodge? This crime has been committed either by a brute or by a crafty blackguard. In any case, we'll easily succeed in finding him."

The rolling of a vehicle made them turn their heads. It was the deputy magistrate, another doctor, and the registrar of the court who had arrived in their turn. They resumed their searches, all chatting in an animated fashion.

Renardet said suddenly:

"Do you know that I am expecting you to lunch with me?"

Everyone smilingly accepted the invitation, and the examining magistrate, finding that the case of little Louise Roque was quite enough to bother about for one day, turned toward the mayor:

"I can have the body brought to your house, can I not? You have a room in which you can keep it for me till this evening."

The other got confused, and stammered:

"Yes—no—no. To tell the truth, I prefer that it should not come into my house on account of—on account of my servants who are already talking about ghosts in—in my tower, in the Fox's Tower. You know—I could no longer keep a single one. No—I prefer not to have it in my house."

The magistrate began to smile:

"Good! I am going to get it carried off at once to Rouy, for the legal examination."

Turning toward the doctor:

"I can make use of your trap, can I not?"

"Yes, certainly."

Everybody came back to the place where the corpse lay. La Roque, now seated beside her daughter, had caught hold of her head, and was staring right before her, with a wandering listless eye.

The two doctors endeavored to lead her away, so that she might not witness the dead girl's removal; but she understood at once what they wanted to do, and, flinging herself on the body, she seized it in both arms. Lying on top of the corpse, she exclaimed:

"You shall not have it—'tis mine—'tis mine now. They have killed her for me, and I want to keep her—you shall not have her——!"

All the men, affected and not knowing how to act, remained standing around her. Renardet fell on his knees, and said to her:

"Listen, La Roque, it is necessary—in order to find out who killed her. Without this it could not be found out. We must make a search for him in order to punish him. When we have found him, we'll give her up to you. I promise you this."

This explanation shook the woman's mind, and a feeling of hatred manifested itself in her distracted glance.

"So then they'll take him?"

"Yes, I promise you that."

She rose up, deciding to let them do as they liked; but when the captain remarked: "'Tis surprising that her clothes cannot be found," a new idea, which she had not previously thought of, abruptly found an entrance into her brain, and she asked:

"Where are her clothes? They're mine. I want them. Where have they been put?"

They explained to her that they had not been found, then she called out for them with desperate obstinacy and with repeated moans:

"They're mine—I want them. Where are they? I want them!"

The more they tried to calm her, the more she sobbed, and persisted in her demands. She no longer wanted the body, she insisted on having the clothes, as much perhaps through the unconscious cupidity of a wretched being to whom a piece of silver represents a fortune, as through maternal tenderness.

And when the little body, rolled up in blankets which had been brought out from Renardet's house, had disappeared in the vehicle, the old woman, standing under the trees, held up by the mayor and the captain, exclaimed:

"I have nothing, nothing, nothing in the world, not even her little cap—her little cap."

The curé had just arrived, a young priest already growing stout. He took it on himself to carry off La Roque, and they went away together toward the village. The mother's grief was modified under the sugary words of the clergyman, who promised her a thousand compensations. But she incessantly kept repeating: "If I had only her little cap."

This idea now dominated every other.

Before they were out of hearing Renardet exclaimed:

"You will lunch with us, Monsieur l'Abbé—in an hour's time?"

The priest turned his head round, and replied:

"With pleasure, Monsieur le Maire. I'll be with you at twelve."

And they all directed their steps toward the house, whose gray front and large tower, built on the edge of the Brindelle, could be seen through the branches.

The meal lasted a long time. They talked about the crime and everybody was of the same opinion. It had been committed by some tramp passing there by chance while the little girl was bathing.

Then the magistrates returned to Rouy, announcing that they would return next day at an early hour. The doctor and the curé went to their respective homes, while Renardet, after a long walk through the meadows, returned to the wood, where he remained walking till nightfall with slow steps, his hands behind his back.

He went to bed early, and was still asleep next morning when the examining magistrate entered his room. He rubbed his hands together with a self-satisfied air. He said:

"Ha! ha! Still sleeping? Well, my dear fellow, we have news this morning."

The mayor sat up on his bed.

"What, pray?"

"Oh! Something strange. You remember well how the mother yesterday clamored for some memento of her daughter, especially her little cap? Well, on opening her door this morning, she found on the threshold her child's two little wooden shoes. This proves that the crime was perpetrated by some one from the district, some one who felt pity for her. Besides, the postman Mederic found and brought me the thimble, the scissors, and the needlecase of the dead

girl. So then the man in carrying off the clothes in order to hide them, must have let fall the articles which were in the pocket. As for me, I attach special importance to the wooden shoes, as they indicate a certain moral culture and a faculty for tenderness on the part of the assassin. We will therefore, if you have no objection, pass in review together the principal inhabitants of your district."

The mayor got up. He rang for hot water to shave with, and said:

"With pleasure, but it will take rather a long time, so let us begin at once."

M. Putoin sat astride on a chair, thus pursuing even in a room, his mania for horsemanship. Renardet now covered his chin with a white lather while he looked at himself in the glass; then he sharpened his razor on the strop and went on:

"The principal inhabitant of Carvelin bears the name of Joseph Renardet, mayor, a rich landowner, a rough man who beats guards and coachmen—"

The examining magistrate burst out laughing:

"That's enough; let us pass on to the next."

"The second in importance is ill. Pelledent, his deputy, a rearer of oxen, an equally rich landowner, a crafty peasant, very sly, very close-fisted on every question of money, but incapable in my opinion of having perpetrated such a crime."

M. Putoin said:

"Let us pass on."

Then, while continuing to shave and wash himself, Renardet went on with the moral inspection of all the inhabitants of Carvelin. After two hours' discussion, their suspicions were fixed on three indi-

viduals who had hitherto borne a shady reputation—a poacher named Cavalle, a fisher for chub and crayfish named Paquet, and a bull-sticker named Clovis.

II

The search for the perpetrator of the crime lasted all the summer, but he was not discovered. Those who were suspected and those who were arrested easily proved their innocence, and the authorities were compelled to abandon the attempt to capture the criminal.

But the murder seemed to have moved the entire country in a singular fashion. It left a disquietude, a vague fear, a sensation of mysterious terror, springing not merely from the impossibility of discovering any trace of the assassin, but above all from that strange finding of the wooden shoes in front of La Roque's door on the day after the crime. The certainty that the murderer had assisted at the investigation and that he was doubtless still living in the village, left a gloomy impression on every mind, and hung over the neighborhood like a constant menace.

The wood, besides, had become a dreaded spot, a place to be avoided, and supposed to be haunted.

Formerly, the inhabitants used to come and lounge there every Sunday afternoon. They used to sit down on the moss at the foot of the huge trees, or walk along the water's edge watching the trout gliding under the green undergrowth. The boys used to play bowls, hide-and-seek, and other games in certain places where they had upturned, smoothed out, and

leveled the soil, and the girls, in rows of four or five, used to trip along holding one another by the arms, and screaming out with their shrill voices ballads which grated on the ear, disturbed the tranquil air with discord and set the teeth on edge like vinegar. Now nobody ventured into and under the towering trees, as if afraid of finding there some corpse lying on the ground.

Autumn arrived; the leaves began to fall. They fell day and night from the tall trees, whirling round and round to the ground; and the sky could be seen through the bare branches. Sometimes when a gust of wind swept over the tree-tops, the slow, continuous rain suddenly grew heavier, and became a hoarsely growling storm, which drenched the moss with thick yellow water that made the ground swampy and yielding. And the almost imperceptible murmur, the floating, ceaseless whisper, gentle and sad, of this rainfall seemed like a low wail, and the continually falling leaves, like tears, big tears shed by the tall mournful trees, which were weeping, as it were, day and night over the close of the year, over the ending of warm dawns and soft twilights, over the ending of hot breezes and bright suns, and also perhaps over the crime which they had seen committed under the shade of their branches, over the girl violated and killed at their feet. They wept in the silence of the desolate empty wood, the abandoned, dreaded wood, where the soul, the childish soul of the dead little girl must have been wandering all alone.

The Brindelle, swollen by the storms, rushed on more quickly, yellow and angry, between its dry banks, lined with thin, bare willow-hedges.

Renardet suddenly resumed his walks under the trees. Every day, at sunset, he came out of his house, descended the front steps slowly, and entered the wood, in a dreamy fashion with his hands in his pockets. For a long time he would pace over the damp, soft moss, while a legion of rooks, rushing to the spot from all the neighboring haunts in order to rest in the tall summits, spread themselves through space, like an immense mourning veil floating in the wind, uttering violent and sinister screams. Sometimes they would perch on the tangled branches dotting with black spots the red sky, the sky crimsoned with autumn twilight. Then, all of a sudden, they would set off again, croaking frightfully and trailing once more above the wood the long darkness of their flight. Then they would swoop down, at last, on the highest tree-tops, and gradually their cawings would die away, while advancing night merged their black plumes into the blackness of space.

Renardet was still strolling slowly under the trees; then, when the darkness prevented him from walking any longer, he went back to the house, sank all of a heap into his armchair in front of the glowing hearth and dried his feet at the fire.

Now, one morning, an important bit of news was circulated around the district: the mayor was getting his wood cut down.

Twenty woodcutters were already at work. They had commenced at the corner nearest to the house, and they worked rapidly in the master's presence.

At first the loppers climbed up the trunk. Tied to it by a rope collar, they clung round it in the beginning with both arms, then, lifting one leg, struck

the tree hard with the edge of a steel instrument attached to each foot. The edge penetrated the wood and remained stuck in it; and the man rose up as if on a step in order to strike with the steel attached to the other foot, and then once more supported himself till he could lift his first foot again.

With every upward movement was slipped higher the rope collar which fastened him to the tree. Over his loins hung and glittered the steel hatchet. He kept continually climbing in easy fashion like some parasite attacking a giant, mounting slowly up the immense trunk, embracing it and spurring it in order to decapitate it.

As soon as he reached the lowest branches, he stopped, detached from his side the sharp ax, and struck. Slowly, methodically, he chopped at the limb close to the trunk. Suddenly the branch cracked, gave way, bent, tore itself off, and fell, grazing the neighboring trees in its fall. Then it crashed down on the ground with a great sound of broken wood, and its slighter branches quivered for a long time.

The soil was covered with fragments which other men cut in their turn, bound in bundles, and piled in heaps, while the trees which were still left standing looked like enormous posts, gigantic forms amputated and shorn by the keen steel axes of the cutters.

When the lopper had finished his task, he left at the top of the straight slender shaft of the tree the rope collar which he had brought up with him, descending again with spur-like prods along the dis-crowned trunk, which the woodcutters below attacked at the base, striking it with heavy blows which resounded through all the rest of the wood.

When the base of the tree seemed pierced deeply enough, some men commenced dragging, to the accompaniment of a signal cry in which all joined harmoniously, at the rope attached to the top. All of a sudden, the immense column cracked and tumbled to the earth with the dull sound and shock of a distant cannon-shot. Each day the wood grew thinner, losing its trees one by one as an army loses its soldiers.

Renardet no longer walked up and down. He remained from morning till night, contemplating, motionless, with his hands behind his back, the slow death of his wood. When a tree fell, he placed his foot on it as if it were a corpse. Then he raised his eyes to the next with a kind of secret, calm impatience, as if he expected or hoped for something at the end of this massacre.

Meanwhile, they were approaching the place where little Louise Roque had been found. At length, they came to it—one evening, at the hour of twilight.

As it was dark, the sky being overcast, the woodcutters wanted to stop their work, putting off till next day the fall of an enormous beech-tree. But Renardet objected to this, insisting that even at this late hour they should lop and cut down this giant, which had overshadowed and seen the crime.

When the lopper had laid it bare, had finished its toilet for the guillotine, and the woodcutters had sapped its base, five men commenced hauling at the rope attached to the top.

The tree resisted; its powerful trunk, although cut half-way through, was as rigid as iron. The workmen, altogether, with a sort of regular jump, strained at the rope, stooping down to the ground, and they

gave vent to a cry with lungs out of breath, so as to indicate and direct their efforts.

Two woodcutters stood close to the giant, with axes in their grip, like two executioners ready to strike once more, and Renardet, motionless, with his hand on the bark, awaited the fall with an uneasy, nervous feeling.

One of the men said to him:

"You're too near, Monsieur le Maire. When it falls, it may hurt you."

He did not reply and did not recoil. He seemed ready to catch the beech-tree in his open arms in order to cast it on the ground like a wrestler.

All at once, at the foot of the tall column of wood there was a shudder which seemed to run to the top, like a painful shiver; it bent slightly, ready to fall, but still resisted. The men, in a state of excitement, stiffened their arms, renewed their efforts with greater vigor, and, just as the tree, breaking, came crashing down, Renardet suddenly made a forward step, then stopped, his shoulders raised to receive the irresistible shock, the mortal blow which would crush him to the earth.

But the beech-tree, having deviated a little, only grazed against his loins, throwing him on his face five meters away.

The workmen rushed forward to lift him up. He had already risen to his knees, stupefied, with wandering eyes, and passing his hand across his forehead, as if he were awaking out of an attack of madness.

When he had got to his feet once more, the men, astonished, questioned him, not being able to under-

stand what he had done. He replied, in faltering tones, that he had had for a moment a fit of abstraction, or rather a return to the days of his childhood, that he imagined he had to pass under that tree, just as street-boys rush in front of vehicles driving rapidly past, that he had played at danger, that, for the past eight days, he felt this desire growing stronger within him, asking himself whether, every time a tree was cracking, was on the point of falling, he could pass beneath it without being touched. It was a piece of stupidity, he confessed; but everyone has these moments of insanity, these temptations to boyish folly.

He made this explanation in a slow tone, searching for his words and speaking in a stupefied fashion.

Then he went off, saying:

"Till to-morrow, my friends—till to-morrow."

As soon as he had reached his study, he sat down before his table, which his lamp, covered with a shade, lighted up brightly, and, clasping his hands over his forehead, began to cry.

He remained crying for a long time, then wiped his eyes, raised his head, and looked at the clock. It was not yet six o'clock.

He thought:

"I have time before dinner."

And he went to the door and locked it. He then came back, and sat down before his table. He pulled out a drawer in the middle of it, and taking from it a revolver, laid it down over his papers, under the glare of the sun. The barrel of the firearm glittered, and cast reflections which resembled flames.

Renardet gazed at it for some time with the

uneasy glance of a drunken man; then he rose and began to pace up and down the room.

He walked from one end of the apartment to the other, stopped from time to time and started to pace up and down again a moment afterward. Suddenly, he opened the door of his dressing-room, steeped a towel in the water-jug and moistened his forehead, as he had done on the morning of the crime.

Then he began to walk up and down once more. Each time he passed the table the gleaming revolver attracted his glance, and tempted his hand; but he kept watching the clock, thinking:

"I have still time."

It struck half past six. Then he took up the revolver, opened his mouth wide with a frightful grimace, and stuck the barrel into it, as if he wanted to swallow it. He remained in this position for some seconds without moving, his finger on the lock; then, suddenly, seized with a shudder of horror, he dropped the pistol on the carpet, and fell back on his arm-chair, sobbing:

"I can't. I dare not! My God! My God! How can I have the courage to kill myself?"

There was a knock at the door. He rose up in a stupefied condition. A servant said:

"Monsieur's dinner is ready."

He replied: "All right. I'm going down."

He picked up the revolver, locked it up again in the drawer, then looked at himself in the glass over the mantelpiece to see whether his face did not look too much troubled. It was, as red as usual, a little redder perhaps. That was all. He went down, and seated himself before the table.

He ate slowly, like a man who wants to drag on the meal, who does not want to be alone with himself.

Then he smoked several pipes in the dining-room while the plates were being removed. After that, he went back to his room.

As soon as he was alone, he looked under his bed, opened all his cupboards, explored every corner, rummaged through all the furniture. Then he lighted the tapers over the mantelpiece, and, turning round several times, ran his eye all over the apartment in an anguish of terror that made his face lose its color, for he knew well that he was going to see her, as he did every night—little Louise Roque, the little girl he had violated and afterward strangled.

Every night the odious vision came back again. First, it sounded in his ears like the snorting that is made by a thrashing machine or the distant passage of a train over a bridge. Then he commenced to pant, to feel suffocated, and had to unbutton his shirt-collar and loosen his belt. He moved about to make his blood circulate, he tried to read, he attempted to sing. It was in vain. His thoughts, in spite of himself, went back to the day of the murder, made him go through it again in all its most secret details, with all the violent emotions he had experienced from first to last.

He had felt on rising up that morning, the morning of the horrible day, a little vertigo and dizziness which he attributed to the heat, so that he remained in his room till the time came for lunch.

After the meal he had taken a siesta, then, toward the close of the afternoon, he had gone out to

breathe the fresh, soothing breeze under the trees in the wood.

But, as soon as he was outside, the heavy scorching air of the plain oppressed him more. The sun, still high in the heavens, poured out on the parched, dry, and thirsty soil, floods of ardent light. Not a breath of wind stirred the leaves. Beasts and birds, even the grasshoppers, were silent. Renardet reached the tall trees, and began to walk over the moss where the Brindelle sent forth a slight, cool vapor under the immense roof of trees. But he felt ill at ease. It seemed to him that an unknown, invisible hand was squeezing his neck, and he could scarcely think rationally, having usually few ideas in his head. For the last three months, only one thought haunted him, the thought of marrying again. He suffered from living alone, suffered from it morally and physically. Accustomed for ten years past to feeling a woman near him, habituated to her presence every moment, to her embrace each successive day, he had need, an imperious and perplexing need of incessant contact with her and the regular touch of her lips. Since Madame Renardet's death, he had suffered continually without knowing why, had suffered from not feeling her dress brush against his legs every day, and, above all, from no longer being able to grow calm and languid in her arms. He had been scarcely six months a widower, and he had already been looking out through the district for some young girl or some widow he might marry when his period of mourning was at an end.

He had a chaste soul, but it was lodged in a vigorous Herculean body, and carnal images began to

disturb his sleep and his vigils. He drove them away; they came back again; and he murmured from time to time, smiling at himself:

"Here I am, like St. Antony."

Having had this morning several besetting visions, the desire suddenly came into his breast to bathe in the Brindelle in order to refresh himself and reduce his feverishness.

He knew, a little further on, of a large deep spot where the people of the neighborhood came sometimes to take a dip in summer. He went there.

Thick willow-trees hid this clear pool of water where the current rested and went to sleep for a little while before starting on its way again. Renardet, as he appeared, thought he heard a light sound, a faint plash which was not that of the stream or the banks. He softly put aside the leaves and looked. A little girl, quite naked in the transparent water, was beating the waves with both hands, dancing about in them a little, and dipping herself with pretty movements. She was not a child nor was she yet a woman. She was plump and well formed, yet had an air of youthful precocity, as of one who had grown rapidly, and who was now almost ripe. He no longer moved, overcome with surprise, with a pang of desire, holding his breath with a strange, poignant emotion. He remained there, his heart beating as if one of his sensual dreams had just been realized; as if an impure fairy had conjured up before him this young creature, this little rustic Venus born of the river foam, who was making his heart beat faster.

Suddenly the little girl came out of the water, and without seeing him came over to where he stood

looking for her clothes in order to dress herself. While she was gradually approaching him with little hesitating steps, through fear of the sharp pointed stones, he felt himself pushed toward her by an irresistible force, by a bestial transport of passion, which stirred up all his carnality, stupefied his soul, and made him tremble from head to foot.

She remained standing some seconds behind the willow-tree which concealed him from view. Then, losing his reason entirely, he opened the branches, rushed on her, and seized her in his arms. She fell, too scared to offer any resistance, too much terror-stricken to cry out, and he possessed her without understanding what he was doing.

He woke up from his crime, as one wakes out of a nightmare. The child burst out weeping.

He said:

"Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue! I'll give you money."

But she did not hear him, she went on sobbing.

He went on:

"Come now, hold your tongue! Do hold your tongue. Keep quiet."

She still kept shrieking, writhing in the effort to get away from him. He suddenly realized that he was ruined, and he caught her by the neck to stop her from uttering these heartrending, dreadful screams. As she continued to struggle with the desperate strength of a being who is flying from death, he pressed his enormous hands on that little throat swollen with cries. In a few seconds he had strangled her, so furiously did he grip her, yet not intending to kill but only to silence her.

Then he rose up overwhelmed with horror.

She lay before him with her face bleeding and blackened. He was going to rush away when there sprang up in his agitated soul the mysterious and undefined instinct that guides all beings in the hour of danger.

It was necessary to throw the body into the water; but he did not; another impulse drove him toward the clothes, of which he made a thin parcel. Then, as he had a piece of twine, he tied it up and hid it in a deep portion of the stream, under the trunk of a tree, the foot of which was immersed in the Brindelle.

Then he went off at a rapid pace, reached the meadows, took a wide turn in order to show himself to peasants who dwelt some distance away on the opposite side of the district, and came back to dine at the usual hour, telling his servants all that was supposed to have happened during his walk.

He slept, however, that night—slept with a heavy, brutish sleep, such as the sleep of persons condemned to death must occasionally be. He opened his eyes at the first glimmer of dawn, and waited, tortured by the fear of having his crime discovered, for his usual waking hour.

Then he would have to be present at all the stages of the inquiry as to the cause of death. He did so after the fashion of a somnambulist, in a hallucination which showed him things and human beings in a sort of dream, in a cloud of intoxication, with that dubious sense of unreality which perplexes the mind at times of the greatest catastrophes.

The only thing that pierced his heart was La Roque's cry of anguish. At that moment he felt

inclined to cast himself at the old woman's feet, and to exclaim:

"'Tis I."

But he restrained himself. He went back, however, during the night, to fish up the dead girl's wooden shoes, in order to carry them to her mother's threshold.

As long as the inquiry lasted, so long as it was necessary to guide and aid justice, he was calm, master of himself, sly and smiling. He discussed quietly with the magistrates all the suppositions that passed through their minds, combated their opinions, and demolished their arguments. He even took a keen and mournful pleasure in disturbing their investigations, in confuting their ideas, in showing the innocence of those whom they suspected.

But from the day when the investigation came to a close, he became gradually nervous, more excitable than he had been before, although he mastered his irritability. Sudden noises made him jump up with fear; he shuddered at the slightest thing, trembled sometimes from head to foot when a fly alighted on his forehead. Then he was seized with an imperious desire for motion, which compelled him to keep continually on foot, and made him remain up whole nights walking to and fro in his own room.

It was not that he was goaded by remorse. His brutal mind did not lend itself to any shade of sentiment or of moral terror. A man of energy and even of violence, born to make war, to ravage conquered countries, and to massacre the vanquished, full of the savage instincts of the hunter and the fighter, he scarcely took count of human life. Though he re-

spected the Church through policy, he believed neither in God nor in the devil, expecting consequently in another life neither chastisement nor recompense for his acts. As his sole creed, he retained a vague philosophy composed of all the ideas of the encyclopedists of the last century. He regarded religion as a moral sanction of the law, both one and the other having been invented by men to regulate social relations.

To kill anyone in a duel, or in a battle, or in a quarrel, or by accident, or for the sake of revenge, or even through bravado, would have seemed to him an amusing and clever thing, and would not have left more impression on his mind than a shot fired at a hare; but he had experienced a profound emotion at the murder of this child. He had, in the first place, perpetrated it in the distraction of an irresistible gust of passion, in a sort of sensual tempest that had overpowered his reason. And he had cherished in his heart, cherished in his flesh, cherished on his lips, cherished even to the very tips of his murderous fingers, a kind of bestial love, as well as a feeling of horror and grief, toward this little girl he had surprised and basely killed. Every moment his thoughts returned to that horrible scene, and, though he endeavored to drive away the picture from his mind, though he put it aside with terror, with disgust, he felt it [surging through his soul, moving about in him, waiting incessantly for the moment to reappear.

Then, in the night, he was afraid, afraid of the shadows falling around him. He did not yet know why the darkness seemed frightful to him; but he instinctively feared it, felt that it was peopled with ter-

rors. The bright daylight did not lend itself to fears. Things and beings were seen there; there only natural things and beings which could exhibit themselves in the light of day could be met. But the night, the impenetrable night, thicker than walls, and empty, the infinite night, so black, so vast, in which one might brush against frightful things, the night when one feels that mysterious terror is wandering, prowling about, appeared to him to conceal an unknown danger, close and menacing.

What was it?

He knew it ere long. As he sat in his armchair, rather late, one evening when he could not sleep, he thought he saw the curtain of his window move. He waited, in an uneasy state of mind, with beating heart. The drapery did not stir, then, all of a sudden it moved once more. He did not venture to rise up; he no longer ventured to breathe, and yet he was brave. He had often fought, and he would have liked to catch thieves in his house.

Was it true that this curtain did move? he asked himself, fearing that his eyes had deceived him. It was, moreover, such a slight thing, a gentle flutter of lace, a kind of trembling in its folds, less than such an undulation as is caused by the wind.

Renardet sat still, with staring eyes, and outstretched neck. Then he sprang to his feet abruptly, ashamed of his fear, took four steps, seized the drapery with both hands, and pulled it wide apart. At first, he saw nothing but darkened glass, resembling plates of glittering ink. The night, the vast, impenetrable night stretched out before him as far as the invisible horizon. He remained standing in front of the

illimitable shadow, and suddenly perceived a light, a moving light, which seemed some distance away.

Then he put his face close to the windowpane, thinking that a person looking for crayfish might be poaching in the Brindelle, for it was past midnight. The light rose up at the edge of the stream, under the trees. As he was not yet able to see clearly, Renardet placed his hands over his eyes. Suddenly this light became an illumination, and he beheld little Louise Roque naked and bleeding on the moss. He recoiled frozen with horror, sank into his chair, and fell backward. He remained there some minutes, his soul in distress; then he sat up and began to reflect. He had had a hallucination—that was all: a hallucination due to the fact that a marauder of the night was walking with a lantern in his hand near the water's edge. What was there astonishing, besides, in the circumstance that the recollection of his crime should sometimes bring before him the vision of the dead girl?

He rose up, swallowed a glass of wine, and sat down again. He thought:

“What am I to do if this come back?”

And it did come back; he felt it; he was sure of it. Already his glance was drawn toward the window; it called him; it attracted him. In order to avoid looking at it, he turned aside his chair. Then, he took a book and tried to read; but it seemed to him that he presently heard something stirring behind him, and he swung round his armchair on one foot.

The curtain still moved—unquestionably, it did move this time; he could no longer have any doubt about it.

He rushed forward and seized it in his grasp so violently that he knocked it down with its fastener. Then, he eagerly pressed his face against the glass. He saw nothing. All was black without; and he breathed with the delight of a man whose life has just been saved.

Then he went back to his chair, and sat down again; but almost immediately he felt a longing to look out through the window once more. Since the curtain had fallen, the space in front of him made a sort of dark patch, fascinating and terrible, on the obscure landscape. In order not to yield to this dangerous temptation, he took off his clothes, extinguished the lamp, and lay down, shutting his eyes.

Lying on his back motionless, his skin hot and moist, he awaited sleep. Suddenly a great gleam of light flashed across his eyelids. He opened them believing that his dwelling was on fire. All was black as before, and he leaned on his elbow in order to try to distinguish his window, which had still for him an unconquerable attraction. By dint of straining his eyes, he could perceive some stars, and he arose, groped his way across the room, discovered the panes with his outstretched hands, and placed his forehead close to them. There below, under the trees, the body of the little girl glittered like phosphorus, lighting up the surrounding darkness.

Renardet uttered a cry and rushed toward his bed, where he lay till morning, his head hidden under the pillow.

From that moment, his life became intolerable. He passed his days in apprehension of each succeeding night; and each night the vision came back again.

As soon as he had locked himself up in his room, he strove to struggle; but in vain. An irresistible force lifted him up and pushed him against the glass, as if to call the phantom, and ere long he saw it lying in the spot where the crime was committed, lying with arms and legs outspread, just in the way the body had been found.

Then the dead girl rose up and came toward him with little steps just as the child had done when she came out of the river. She advanced quietly, passing straight across the grass, and over the border of withered flowers. Then she rose up into the air toward Renardet's window. She came toward him, as she had come on the day of the crime. And the man recoiled before the apparition—he retreated to his bed, and sank down upon it, knowing well that the little one had entered the room, and that she now was standing behind the curtain, which presently moved. And until daybreak, he kept staring at this curtain, with a fixed glance, ever waiting to see his victim depart.

But she did not show herself any more; she remained there behind the curtain which quivered tremulously now and then.

And Renardet, his fingers clinging to the bed-clothes, squeezed them as he had squeezed the throat of little Louise Roque.

He heard the clock striking the hours; and in the stillness the pendulum kept time with the loud beatings of his heart. And he suffered, the wretched man, more than any man had ever suffered before.

Then, as soon as a white streak of light on the ceiling announced the approaching day, he felt him-

self free, alone at last, alone in his room; and then he went to sleep. He slept some hours—a restless, feverish sleep in which he retraced in dreams the horrible vision of the night just past.

When, later on, he went down to breakfast, he felt exhausted as if after prodigious fatigue; and he scarcely ate anything, haunted as he was by the fear of what he had seen the night before.

He knew, however, that it was not an apparition—that the dead do not come back, and that his sick soul, possessed by one thought alone, by an indelible remembrance, was the only cause of his punishment, was the only evoker of that awful image, brought back by it to life, called up by it and raised by it before his eyes, in which the ineffaceable resemblance remained imprinted. But he knew, too, that he could not cure it, that he could never escape from the savage persecution of his memory; and he resolved to die, rather than endure these tortures any longer.

Then, he pondered how he would kill himself. He wished for some simple and natural death which would preclude the idea of suicide. For he clung to his reputation, to the name bequeathed to him by his ancestors; and if there were any suspicion as the cause of his death, people's thoughts might be perhaps directed toward the mysterious crime, toward the murderer who could not be found, and they would not hesitate to accuse him.

A strange idea came into his head, that of letting himself be crushed by the tree at the foot of which he had assassinated little Louise Roque. So he determined to have the wood cut down and to sim-

ulate an accident. But the beech-tree refused to smash his ribs.

Returning to his house, a prey to utter despair, he had snatched up his revolver, and then he did not dare to fire it.

The dinner bell summoned him. He could eat nothing, and went upstairs again. But he did not know what he was going to do. Now that he had escaped the first time, he felt himself a coward. Presently, he would be ready, fortified, decided, master of his courage and of his resolution; just now, he was weak, and feared death as much as he did the dead girl.

He faltered out to himself:

"I will not venture it again—I will not venture it."

Then he glanced with terror, first at the revolver on the table, and next at the curtain which hid his window. It seemed to him, moreover, that something horrible would occur as soon as his life was ended. Something? What? A meeting with her, perhaps! She was watching for him; she was waiting for him; she was calling him; and her object was to seize him in her turn, to exhibit herself to him every night so that she might draw him toward the doom that would avenge her, and lead him to death.

He began to cry like a child, repeating:

"I will not venture it again—I will not venture it,"

Then, he fell on his knees, and murmured: "My God! my God!" without believing, nevertheless, in God. He no longer dared, in fact, to look out through his window where he knew the apparition was visible, nor at the table where his revolver gleamed.

When he had risen up, he said:

"This cannot last; there must be an end of it."

The sound of his voice in the silent room made a shiver of fear pass through his limbs, but, as he could not come to a decision, as he felt certain that his finger would always refuse to pull the trigger of his revolver, he turned round to hide his head under the bedclothes, and to plunge into reflection.

He would have to find some way in which he could force himself to die, to invent some device against himself, which would not permit of any hesitation on his part, any delay, any possible regrets. He began to envy condemned criminals who are led to the scaffold surrounded by soldiers. Oh! if he could only beg of some one to shoot him; if he could, confessing the state of his soul, confessing his crime to a sure friend who would never divulge it, obtain from him death.

But from whom could he ask this terrible service? From whom? He cast about for one among his friends whom he knew intimately. The doctor? No, he would talk about it afterward, most certainly. And suddenly a fantastic idea entered his mind. He would write to the examining magistrate, who was on terms of close friendship with him and would denounce himself as the perpetrator of the crime. He would in this letter confess everything, revealing how his soul had been tortured, how he had resolved to die, how he had hesitated about carrying out his resolution, and what means he had employed to strengthen his failing courage. And in the name of their old friendship he would implore of the other to destroy the letter as soon as he had ascertained that

the culprit had inflicted justice on himself. Renardet could rely on this magistrate; he knew him to be sure, discreet, incapable of even an idle word. He was one of those men who have an inflexible conscience, governed, directed, regulated by their reason alone.

Scarcely had he formed this project when a strange feeling of joy took possession of his heart. He was calm now. He would write his letter slowly, then at daybreak he would deposit it in the box nailed to the wall in his office, then he would ascend his tower to watch for the postman's arrival, and when the man in the blue blouse came in sight, he would cast himself headlong on to the rocks on which the foundations rested. First he would take care to be seen by the workmen who were cutting down his wood. He would then climb to the parapet some distance up which bore the flagstaff displayed on *fête* days. He would smash this pole with a shake and precipitate it along with him.

Who would suspect that it was not an accident? And he would be dashed to pieces, having regard to his weight and the height of the tower.

Presently he got out of bed, went over to the table, and began to write. He omitted nothing, not a single detail of the crime, not a single detail of the torments of his heart, and he ended by announcing that he had passed sentence on himself—that he was going to execute the criminal—and begged of his friend, his old friend, to be careful that there should never be any stain on his memory.

When he had finished his letter, he saw that the day had dawned.

He closed it, sealed it, and wrote the address; then he descended with light steps, hurried toward the little white box fastened to the wall in the corner of the farmhouse, and when he had thrown into it the fatal paper which made his hand tremble, he came back quickly, shot the bolts of the great door, and climbed up to his tower to wait for the passing of the postman, who would convey his death sentence.

He felt self-possessed, now. Liberated! Saved!

A cold dry wind, an icy wind, passed across his face. He inhaled it eagerly, with open mouth, drinking in its chilling kiss. The sky was red, with a burning red, the red of winter, and all the plain whitened with frost glistened under the first rays of the sun, as if it had been powdered with bruised glass.

Renardet, standing up, with his head bare, gazed at the vast tract of country before him, the meadow to the left, and to the right the village whose chimneys were beginning to smoke with the preparations for the morning meal. At his feet he saw the Brindelle flowing toward the rocks, where he would soon be crushed to death. He felt himself reborn on that beautiful frosty morning, full of strength, full of life. The light bathed him and penetrated him like a new-born hope. A thousand recollections assailed him, recollections of similar mornings, of rapid walks, the hard earth which rang under his footsteps, of happy chases on the edges of pools where wild ducks sleep. All the good things that he loved, the good things of existence rushed into memory, penetrated him with fresh desires, awakened all the vigorous appetites of his active, powerful body.

And he was about to die? Why? He was going to kill himself stupidly, because he was afraid of a shadow—afraid of nothing? He was still rich and in the prime of life! What folly! All he wanted was distraction, absence, a voyage in order to forget.

This night even he had not seen the little girl because his mind was preoccupied, and so had wandered toward some other subject. Perhaps he would not see her any more? And even if she still haunted him in his house, certainly she would not follow him elsewhere! The earth was wide, the future was long.

Why die?

His glance traveled across the meadows, and he perceived a blue spot in the path which wound alongside of the Brindelle. It was Mederic coming to bring letters from the town and to carry away those of the village.

Renardet got a start, a sensation of pain shot through his breast, and he rushed toward the winding staircase to get back his letter, to demand it back from the postman. Little did it matter to him now whether he was seen. He hurried across the grass moistened by the light frost of the previous night, and he arrived in front of the box in the corner of the farmhouse exactly at the same time as the letter-carrier.

The latter had opened the little wooden door, and drew forth the papers deposited there by the inhabitants of the locality.

Renardet said to him:

"Good morrow, Mederic."

"Good morrow, M'sieu' le Maire."

"I say, Mederic, I threw a letter into the box that I want back again. I came to ask you to give it back to me."

"That's all right, M'sieu' le Maire—you'll get it."

And the postman raised his eyes. He stood petrified at the sight of Renardet's face. The mayor's cheeks were purple, his eyes were glaring with black circles round them as if they were sunk in his head, his hair was all tangled, his beard untrimmed, his necktie unfastened. It was evident that he had not gone to bed.

The postman asked:

"Are you ill, M'sieu' le Maire?"

The other, suddenly comprehending that his appearance must be unusual, lost countenance, and faltered:

"Oh! no—oh! no. Only I jumped out of bed to ask you for this letter. I was asleep. You understand?"

Said Mederic: "What letter?"

"The one you are going to give back to me."

Mederic now began to hesitate. The mayor's attitude did not strike him as natural. There was perhaps a secret in that letter, a political secret. He knew Renardet was not a Republican, and he knew all the tricks and chicaneries employed at elections.

He asked:

"To whom is it addressed, this letter of yours?"

"To M. Putoin, the examining magistrate—you know my friend, M. Putoin, well!"

The postman searched through the papers, and found the one asked for. Then he began looking at it, turning it round and round between his fingers,

much perplexed, much troubled by the fear of committing a grave offense or of making an enemy for himself of the mayor.

Seeing his hesitation, Renardet made a movement for the purpose of seizing the letter and snatching it away from him. This abrupt action convinced Mederic that some important secret was at stake and made him resolve to do his duty, cost what it might.

So he flung the letter into his bag and fastened it up, with the reply:

"No, I can't, M'sieu' le Maire. From the moment it is addressed and sent to the magistrate, I can't."

A dreadful pang wrung Renardet's heart, and he murmured:

"Why, you know me well. You are even able to recognize my handwriting. I tell you I want that paper."

"I can't."

"Look here, Mederic, you know that I'm incapable of deceiving you—I tell you I want it."

"No, I can't."

A tremor of rage passed through Renardet's soul.

"Damn it all, take care! You know that I don't go in for chaffing, and that I could get you out of your job, my good fellow, and without much delay either. And then, I am the mayor of the district, after all; and I now order you to give me back that paper."

The postman answered firmly:

"No, I can't, M'sieu' le Maire."

Thereupon, Renardet, losing his head, caught hold of the postman's arms in order to take away his bag;

but, freeing himself by a strong effort, and springing backward, the letter-carrier raised his big holly stick. Without losing his temper, he said emphatically:

"Don't touch me, M'sieu' le Maire, or I'll strike. Take care, I'm only doing my duty!"

Feeling that he was lost, Renardet suddenly became humble, gentle, appealing to him like a crying child:

"Look here, look here, my friend, give me back that letter, and I'll recompense you—I'll give you money. Stop! Stop! I'll give you a hundred francs, you understand—a hundred francs!"

The postman turned on his heel and started on his journey.

Renardet followed him, out of breath, faltering:

"Mederic, Mederic, listen! I'll give you a thousand francs, you understand—a thousand francs."

The postman still went on without giving any answer.

Renardet went on:

"I'll make your fortune, you understand—whatever you wish—fifty thousand francs—fifty thousand francs for that letter! What does it matter to you? You won't? Well, a hundred thousand—I say—a hundred thousand francs. Do you understand? A hundred thousand francs—a hundred thousand francs."

The postman turned back, his face hard, his eye severe:

"Enough of this, or else I'll repeat to the magistrate everything you have just said to me."

Renardet stopped abruptly. It was all over. He turned back and rushed toward his house, running like a hunted animal.

Then, in his turn, Mederic stopped, and watched this flight with stupefaction. He saw the mayor re-entering his own house, and he waited still as if something astonishing was about to happen.

Presently the tall form of Renardet appeared on the summit of the Fox's Tower. He ran round the platform like a madman. Then he seized the flagstaff and shook it furiously without succeeding in breaking it; then, all of a sudden, like a swimmer taking a plunge, he dived into the air with his two hands in front of him.

Mederic rushed forward to give succor. As he crossed the park, he saw the woodcutters going to work. He called out to them, telling them an accident had occurred, and at the foot of the walls they found a bleeding body the head of which was crushed on a rock. The Brindelle surrounded this rock, and over its clear, calm waters, swollen at this point, could be seen a long, thin, red stream of mingled brains and blood.

